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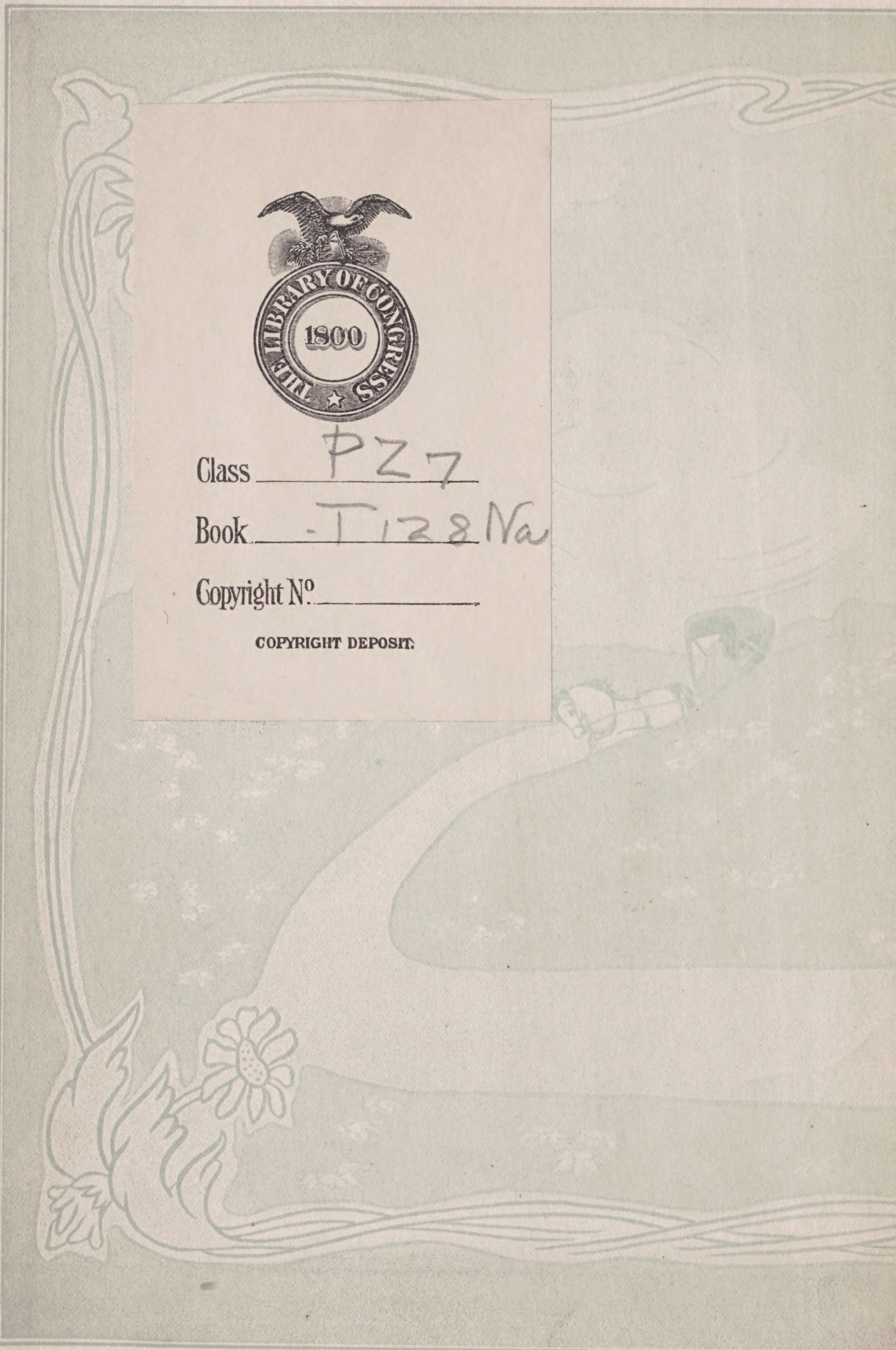
THE DOCTORS LITTLE PARTNER

MARION · AMES · TAGGART

THE DOCTOR'S LITTLE GIRL SERIES



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THE DOCTOR'S LITTLE PARTNER

WORKS OF
MARION AMES TAGGART

The Doctor's Little Girl Series

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THE DOCTOR'S LITTLE GIRL

SWEET NANCY: OR, MORE ABOUT THE DOCTOR'S LITTLE GIRL

NANCY, THE DOCTOR'S LITTLE PARTNER

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L. C. PAGE AND COMPANY
53 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass.

NANCY PORTER.

The Doctor's Little Girl Series

NANCY

THE DOCTOR'S LITTLE PARTNER

BY

Marion Ames Taggart

Author of

"The Doctor's Little Girl," "Sweet Nancy," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

Etheldred Breeze

BOSTON
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TO

Lois Storm Goodell

THIS STORY OF ANOTHER DEAR LITTLE GIRL
IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED

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NANCY

THE DOCTOR'S LITTLE PARTNER

CHAPTER I

A MAY - DAY MORNING

“DAME TROT!” called Doctor Porter at the foot of the stairs.

“Doctor Porter!” quickly responded his one little girl in her sweet voice. In an instant her face appeared, smiling down at her father from over the bannisters.

“I'm going over to the Falls to see Doctor Ganson. Didn't I hear you saying you wanted to call on Cord? I'll leave you there, if you like,” the doctor said.

“Oh, yes, I do — do want to see Cord and do like,” cried Nancy. “I'll be right down, dear.”

Mrs. Porter came across the hall from her own room to Nancy's.

" I heard your father say he would take you to see Cord," Nancy's mother said. " Will you leave this package with Lydia Slocum? It's the soft wrap I've been making for her."

Nancy looked at her mother in the glass and laughed. " It's one of the nicest things about being Nancy Porter that you have so many things always ready to send by me to people; I'm sure of being welcome," she said.

Mrs. Porter come up behind Nancy and put her hands on her shoulders; the mother's calm, true eyes looked lovingly into Nancy's gray-blue ones, both by their reflection in the glass. Nancy had grown much taller within a year; the dark hair that had been cut short when she had nearly died of scarlet fever had grown long and thick, there was a suggestion of colour under the surface of her pale ivory-tinted skin; altogether she looked stronger, now that she was " half past twelve " than she had looked when she was younger. Doctor Mark Porter and his wife rejoiced to see their one treasure tightening her hold on life as she advanced farther into it.

Nancy's reflection smiled at her mother, as her mother's smiled at her.

" As long as you go about with your father on visits that are, so many of them, errands of mercy, you don't need your frumpy old mother to give you packages to insure you a welcome," said Mrs. Porter.

"I wonder what I shall ever do to be liked for myself!" cried Nancy, wheeling around with a final twitch of her hair ribbon. "I'll never be anything but the Doctor's little girl in Chagford. I'm sure all my life I'll hear people saying: 'Oh, Nancy Porter's well enough, but she can't hold a candle to her father and mother!' It's going to be dreadful!"

"Perhaps by that time Chagford will have so many electric lights you won't be required to hold a candle," suggested Mrs. Porter. "Run along, silly Nancy; I hear Tonic's footsteps."

Nancy gave her mother a swift kiss and ran out of the room, down the stairs and out of the door. Her father was waiting at the foot of the steps in the low buggy which he had used for half of Nancy's life, in all sorts of weather, but which he could not be persuaded to give up. Faithful Tonic, the brown horse who was one of the family, older by several years than Nancy, turned his head to make sure that the little girl was coming. Tonic seemed to understand that the doctor needed "his assistant" when he started out.

"'Oh, that we two were Maying,' Nancy," quoted the doctor, as Nancy got in and settled herself at her father's side. He reached over and tucked the light weight lap robe around her in order to look inquiringly into her face.

"It's such a perfect morning, Toodles; don't you wish we were going Maying?"

"What do you suppose Letty Hetty told me yesterday when I was wishing?" asked Nancy. "She said to be wishing, instead of enjoying what you had, was like a cribbing horse, that chewed away on posts and fences instead of sticking to his good oats, imagining there was something better than he had, and all he made out was suckin' wind and dyin' of colic, most likely, Letty Hetty said." Nancy quoted the last words in exact imitation of the voice and accent of the Porters' factotum, good Letty Hetty, who had presided over the house and the housework since before Nancy came into the world.

Doctor Porter laughed. "That sounds like Letty Hetty and is good doctrine, though it seems rather hard on me, considering I was wishing. Do you intend it as a rebuke, Miss?" he asked.

Nancy shook her head hard. "I'm glad you want to go Maying — with me!" she said. "But it is a lovely morning for a drive, even a little drive, like this one to the Slocums'."

"'I am content with what I have, little be it or much,'" the doctor quoted again. "Right you are, little Assistant! Do you know why I am going to see Doctor Ganson?"

"About the hospital?" guessed Nancy promptly.

"Just that. The long-standing opinion that we need a hospital in Chagford, one for all the Chagfords, North Chagford and Chagford Falls included, seems to be fermenting. We doctors, Davidson, Ganson and Porter, think if we started the thing in earnest the public would earnestly help. I'm going over to see my brother in the profession to discuss making a definite move in the matter," the doctor explained, after his fashion of talking over his plans and his patients with this one beloved little daughter, whom he called and tried to make "his assistant."

"We could help a good deal ourselves," remarked Nancy thoughtfully.

"I shall expect you to do wonders if a fair is held, which is the best plan we can think of now," said the doctor.

"I meant — aren't we rather rich, father?" asked Nancy. "You know on that wonderful day when that man you used to know came, when you were away, and left with me all that money, to pay you back the loan you made him when he was young, with its interest, I thought fifty thousand dollars was an immense fortune. But it doesn't seem to have made much difference."

"Oh, dear me, yes, it has, Nancy," said the doctor quickly. "It gives us twenty-five hundred dollars to spend that does not come from my practice. Have you forgotten how many pleasant things we have been able to afford this past year and more, since that happened? Trips to Boston, music, even jewels!" The doctor touched one of Nancy's slender fingers that wore a circle of sapphires.

"I believe mother is right when she says it makes you able to afford not to send in as many bills as you did — and you never sent in many!" laughed Nancy, with an accusing shake of the coat sleeve nearest to her.

The doctor looked guilty. "There are so many people in Chagford to whom a bill is a real misfortune," he said apologetically.

"Dearest Doctor-daddy, I don't blame you for not sending them, but you work hard to cure the people; the bills are really less than your just dues," said Nancy, who had grown old enough to keep her father's books, so knew whereof she spoke. Her eyes were full of the tenderest love and pride as she looked at him; she worshipped this great-hearted doctor whose service to his community was like that of a faithful shepherd to his flock, and who hated the money side of his reward.

"Wouldn't you rather spell it the other way?" asked Doctor Porter. "'The quality of mercy is not strain'd, it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven.' I'd rather it were that sort of dews, daughterkin."

Nancy had been brought up in the companionship of drives with her father in which he had made her familiar with the poets, Shakespeare and the lesser ones, and had taught her the ripeness of his own kindly wisdom. So, too, she had spent her mornings doing lessons with her mother, that rare and noble woman, so that the doctor's little girl had been fortunate in a singular education that far exceeded, in the highest values, anything that the best schools could give her.

She raised her sweet, earnest little face to her father now, with the love in her eyes that was the doctor's dearest recompense for all his well-lived life.

"I'd rather it were, you dearest Doctor Mark Porter, and I'd rather you'd rather it were," she said.

"I forgot to ask where Rick was," said the doctor unexpectedly, having given Nancy a comradeship pat on her shoulder.

"Rick went down to the music store to see if he could get a new A string for his violin, and they were going to get new violin music; he was going to look at that, too," said Nancy. "Afterward he is coming up to the Slocums to see Miss Lydia as usual; he will be there to go home with us — or aren't you going to fetch me? Shall I walk home?"

"Perhaps you'd better not wait for me, Dame Trot. I may be detained longer than you will care to stay. Here we are," added the doctor, stopping Tonic at the gate of the Slocum house, and turning the wheel for Nancy to get out.

Nancy hopped out, and then gravely put out her hand to shake the doctor's before she left him. Then she patted Tonic's nose and gave him a handful of young grass. This done, the doctor pulled up the reins and the old horse trotted sedately away, leaving Nancy to turn her attention to the house.

Nothing had altered since the day, two years before, when the doctor had driven his little girl there to see the lame boy whom the Slocum sisters had taken into their home, the friendless child who would otherwise have depended upon the charity of the town. Nevertheless he had in his veins the blood of one of Chagford's oldest families, the Loverings, on one side, and gentle Italian blood on the other. Since then the elder of the two elderly sisters, Lydia Slocum, had been crippled by a fall and was bedridden, while Richard Lovering, entirely cured of his lameness, had spent more than a year in the doctor's family, where he was beloved almost like a son of the house. And the elfish little Cordelia Tilden, called Cord by every one, who had no one on earth belonging to her, had come to live with the Slocums because, though she was two years younger than Nancy, she was competent to help the Slocums, and they required help since Lydia had been crippled. It was a case of mutual need, and the arrangement had worked perfectly. Cord was a character, a changeling, the doctor declared, the funniest, quickest, most snappingly efficient little thing imaginable, tolerant of Nancy's two friends, Miriam Hunt and Doris Clark, who, with Nancy, had constituted themselves her guardians, but adoring Nancy, who could manage her when no one else could.

Cord had seen Nancy coming now, and had the door open, and was down the walk to meet her in a flash.

"Hallo, you Chocolate Cream!" Cord cried, rushing at Nancy tempestuously. She was not much taller in her eleventh year than she had been at nine, a tiny, dark creature, whose growth seemed to take the form of concentration, as if it were that of a fire getting stronger all the time in a little dark brazier.

"Hallo, Cordie," echoed Nancy, receiving the onslaught of Cord's welcome unsteadily.

"Any news?"

"Mercy gave me a dress," said Cord with a twinkle in her black eyes, as she turned them comically on Nancy without turning her head. Cord never could be got to say Miss Lydia or Miss Mercy to the elderly women with whom she lived. She availed herself to the full of the country freedom from ceremony. "What's the use?" was her one reply to persuasion on this head.

"That's good!" said Nancy.

"Sure," agreed Cord. "It's purple with a white spot; I'm going to try to swap it."

"Cordie, you mustn't!" cried Nancy, but she had to laugh.

"Watch me," said Cord decidedly. "I'm not going to wear purple; now wouldn't I look great in it? I know a coon lady over to Chagford Falls that'll love it. I'm going to make her buy a pink gingham and take my purple calico — she'll do it, and Mercy won't care. I'll tell her how the coon lady loved purple, and I loved pink, and she'll just be glad two people are pleased. Mercy's awful easy-going; she don't care a cent, and Lydia lets me do as I want to — I know why!"

"Cordie, you look scampish; when you look like that I know you mean something you shouldn't! Why does Miss Lydia let you do as you like?" demanded Nancy, who felt responsible for the training of this younger child, since she and Mimi and Doris had constituted themselves her guardians, but who found the task weighty.

"Because it makes her fidget to have Mercy tidy up her room, and I don't do it unless I'm friendly with her," said Cord.

"Cordelia! You ought to do it all the time," said Nancy sternly.

"I do, now, 'cause Lydia never scolds at me. I had to make her pleasant, Nancy; it's just as good for her. Don't you look so sober at me, you Nancy-Chocolate-Cream-Strawberry-Sundae! You're not used to man'ging things, like I am." Cord wound her thin arm about Nancy coaxingly, and Nancy gave up the argument, as she often did, with inward twinges of conscience lest she neglected her duty. But this sharp little creature, used from her cradle to taking care of herself, had much more worldly wisdom than Nancy, older though she was and knowing book lore that would never be Cord's.

"I came to tell you that we've got to have a ceremony for Doris," said Nancy dropping the subject. "We are going to have a meeting to-morrow afternoon, and you're invited."

"Where? What for?" asked Cord. The two girls had stopped on the stone walk to talk.

"Well, you've heard how mamma got Doris' aunt to let her keep on playing with the dolls," said Nancy. "Miss Clark thought Doris was too big, and that was ever so long ago. An aunt isn't like a mother, or anyway Doris' aunt isn't. You know we dressed Mildred, and gave her to you, and Miss Clark only let Doris keep on with Leonora, her doll, because mamma made her see it was good for Doris to dress a doll to give away, taught her to sew and be kind, both. But now Miss Clark insists on Doris' giving away her doll to a mission box, and Doris can't stand that. So we're going to have a meeting to-morrow and solemnly give up dolls — Mimi, Doris and I. We're going to put my Rosamond and Doris' Leonora and Mimi's Dorothy together up in my attic, and mamma's going to coax Miss Clark to let Doris leave her there, not send her off to the mission, because that would be harder — to know somebody else played with her."

"I'll come to your meeting," said Cord violently, "but you don't catch me giving up Mildred, not one bit!"

"Mercy, no, Cordie, you're younger than we are; it wouldn't be sensible. Besides, we're planning to make lots of clothes for Mildred after we give up our dolls, and then we shall mind it less — Mildred's just like ours, you know, same size and everything," said Nancy mournfully.

"Nancy, what on earth makes you give up dolls when you don't want to?" demanded Cord. "I sh'd think Doris' aunt'd be 'shamed, meddling in like that — so silly!"

"We want to, Cordie," said Nancy. "That is, it makes us feel solemn and sad to take the step, making it clear that we really give them up, because we love them, but we don't enjoy them when we try to play with them. Every time we get them out, Mimi and Doris, and I, we don't play; we just sit around and hold them, and move their arms and legs into cute positions, and try on their clothes, but it ends in our just sitting around and talking. We're in our thirteenth year, you know; I shall be thirteen next October, and I suppose we can't enjoy dolls the same as we did. But it's rather sad giving them up — it's just as sad trying to enjoy them, if you think about it, though. Anyway, we're going to have a ceremony to-morrow afternoon, and you're asked."

"I'll be there," said Cord laconically. "Rick's inside; you'd better come in."

Nancy went in. On the bed, to which she was now perpetually confined and which had been moved into the sitting-room that she might be in the middle of what life came her way, lay Lydia Slocum. Patience had been hard to her, naturally impatient and active, "cross," her neighbours had said. But she had acquired the virtue to a great extent, and it had improved her. Her face was gentler, her voice less strident.

Beside her sat Rick. He had grown tall and slender; health and happiness had made his beautiful face more boyish. Lydia Slocum kept her eyes upon him constantly. The queer Slocum sisters had grown fond of the boy while he had lived with them; he had brought gentleness and the love for a child into their lives when he had come to them, frail, lame and friendless. Now his almost daily visits were the keenest pleasure the bedridden sister had, and Rick was faithful in keeping her in touch with his pleasures and interests.

"Well, Nancy Porter," said Miss Lydia pleasantly, "there isn't one thing left for you to tell me! This boy has told it all, an' livin' in the same house with you, he hasn't left you a syllable. All the same I'm glad you dropped in."

"I've got to drop right out again, Miss Lydia," laughed Nancy. "Father isn't going to call for me; he's afraid he may be kept over to the Falls too long."

"What's he gone there for?" asked Lydia.

"There is something Rick didn't tell then!" cried Nancy. "It looks as though we were going to have the Chagford Hospital, Miss Lydia. Father has gone now to see Doctor Ganson about it. He says he thinks that everybody is ready for it, and they can begin it soon. Had Rick told you that?"

"No, but it's good news," said Miss Lydia. "I'll tell you what it is, bein' crippled makes you think more'n you might have about givin' others a chance not to be where you are. Must you really go right along, Nancy? Well, come again when you can sit a spell. I'd like you should come with Mimi Hunt an' Doris Clark, an' Rick bring his fiddle an' sing to me. I enjoy music more'n I did when I was up an' 'round."

"We'll come, Miss Lydia," said Nancy. "And may Cord come to see me to-morrow afternoon, please?"

"Nothin' to prevent. I'm always too thankful to have that flyaway child go to your house," said Miss Lydia.

"Now, Lydia, you know you think I'm just about right; what'd you do without me?" cried Cord whisking close to Miss Lydia and instantly whisking away again.

"I'd show you what I'd do with you, if I was on my feet!" Miss Lydia pretended to growl, but Nancy and Rick saw with pleasure that she looked affectionately at the queer mite.

Rick and Nancy walked slowly home together, talking as fast as they could. Nancy rejoiced in Rick, wondering how her own brother, had she one, could be any dearer to her than this boy. She knew from experience of Mimi's older brother that own brothers were sometimes less kind. Rick understood Nancy's every thought and feeling; they were both citizens of the beautiful Land of Make-Believe, in which they spent their happiest hours together.

In the year which he had passed in the doctor's household Rick had shared Nancy's privilege of hearing read aloud the best treasures of the English tongue, and he had grown in mind, as he had in body, delighting in the home atmosphere for which nature had especially fitted the gifted, sensitive lad.

Letty Hetty saw the children coming, and went out to meet them.

"I was wonderin' how much longer you'd be," she said. "I didn't know whether to look for you in the buggy along the road, or walkin' on the sidewalk. I'm glad you've got here. I'm goin' to make shortcake for supper an' I'd like somebody to hull the berries."

But both Rick and Nancy knew that the real reason that Letty Hetty was glad to see them, was merely that she *was* glad to see them!

CHAPTER II

“STANDING WITH RELUCTANT FEET”

THE upper floor of Doctor Porter’s barn was not only as clean as a parlour, but it was fragrant as only a tidy barn can be; bran and oats added their wholesome smell to the clean, dry odour of straw and the sweetness of clover and timothy. Nancy loved the place; she and Rick had established their “studios” in an empty corner near the big window, through which hay was hauled up in July. This window had a wooden door that slid back and let in a wide piece of scenery, the hills that surrounded Chagford, with a glimpse of the river and a little gleam of the pond — now promoted to be called a lake — which lay up in the direction of the great stone Allaire house, where Miss Dorinda and Miss Belinda Allaire lived, two of Nancy’s best friends.

Nancy, who had secretly “commenced author,” as our English cousins say, had a desk made of a soap box in this corner of the barn, in which she kept the verses she wrote and the first chapters of her first novel — so far they seemed in a fair way to be also its last chapters. Nancy wrote on the top of this box, seated on the hay-strewn floor. Rick, whose violin playing was remarkable for a little boy, had "a music studio" close to Nancy's desk, but more in the middle of the big bay window, which, when it was open, let him look off to the beauty beyond, inspiring him to melody of his own. Rick's Italian grandmother must have accounted for his music; it could not have come to him through his New England Lovering ancestors.

Here, in the barn chamber, the following afternoon, Mimi Hunt, Doris Clark and Cordelia Tilden came solemnly to bid farewell to their youth, or rather to Mimi, Doris and Nancy's youth, for Cord scorned the performance as silly, holding resolutely to her big doll, Mildred, whom she had brought to the meeting, but not in any wise to bid her good-by.

Nancy had gone up to the meeting place early, carrying her beloved Rosamond, dressed in her best, like the daughter of a captive Gaul adorned for a Roman sacrifice. Rick followed Nancy with his violin to make music, at her request, for the ceremony.

He looked amused, yet solemnly excited, too. He and Nancy saw things alike, by the light of the imagination which they shared, and Nancy had fired Rick with something of her own feelings on this awe-inspiring occasion.

Nancy did not talk to Rick after they got to the barn chamber temple. She placed Rosamond on the hay beside her and held her hand, waiting for the others to arrive. They came soon. Nancy drew a quick inward breath as she heard them on the stairs and recognized Mimi's step, because she tripped as lightly as plump people do, and she knew Doris when she stumbled, and knew it was because she held Leonora high and tight and could not see well over her.

"Have you been waiting long?" asked Mimi breathlessly.

"Just a few minutes," said Nancy, shaking her head. "I told Cordie to come, but she isn't here. Of course she's too young to give up Mildred; she thought I meant that when I told her about it, and asked her."

"She wouldn't anyway," observed Doris, knowing Cord. "Where shall the dolls sit? We ought not to hold them."

"There," said Nancy, pointing to a box. It was draped with red, white and blue bunting, a little the worse for being wind-whipped, left from previous Fourth of July celebrations.

" I tried to think of something pretty to cover their seat with, something suitable, but there didn't seem to be anything but that bunting," Nancy explained.

" Red, white and blue's all right. We're going to declare ourselves grown up, just like the thirteen original States," said Mimi.

" It's a very different thing to declare yourself free from a tyrant and to declare you won't associate with some one you loved dearly," said Nancy, revelling in the melancholy thought. " I hear Cord, I think."

She did hear her. Cord came running into the barn and up the stairs, whooping as she came and stubbing her toe violently against the edge of one of the steps.

" Did you wait for me? " she panted. " I just ran and tore down here, but I couldn't come till I'd done the dishes, and then I tore my skirt, whisking out to hang up the towel, and they both said I shouldn't come till I darned the tear, to make me remember not to be careless! Maybe I wasn't mad! You can bet I'll hammer that old nail on the back porch to-morrow so it'll know what's hittin' it! Started your meetin'?"

"No, Cord, we haven't; the girls haven't been here long enough," said Rick, who enjoyed Cord beyond expression. "You sit down; it's going to begin."

"And you may as well hold Mildred, because she isn't going to be given up; only Mimi's Dorothy, Doris' Leonora and my Rosamond," said Nancy, speaking her doll's name with a clinging to its musical sound and a lowering of her voice.

"Not much Mildred isn't!" declared Cord, tumbling down with her child in her arms in a heap on the hay, and affectionately touching up her curls. Cord's doll alone of the four, though she had not owned her as long as the others had owned theirs, looked tousled, as though her life was not a calm one, as it probably was not.

"Who's in the chair?" asked Nancy, who had been present at public meetings.

"You are," cried Mimi and Doris together, while Cord flippantly asked nobody in particular: "Who's in the hay?"

"Then will the meeting please come to order," said Nancy, shaking her head at Cord.

"Ladies and gentleman," began Nancy. "We are met together this afternoon for a solemn reason. We will open the exercises with a recitation by Miss Miriam Hunt, 'The Dead Doll.'"

Mimi arose and gravely recited the familiar lines, bowed, and resumed her seat upon the hay.

"Miss Doris Clark will next address the meeting," announced Nancy.

Doris got on her feet, looking as uncomfortably embarrassed as if it were a Sunday-School convention which she was called upon to address.

"Ladies and gentlemen — I mean gentleman," she began. "It is my fault that we have to have this meeting. Aunt Augusta, I mean Miss Augusta Clark, wishes me to send away my adopted daughter, Leonora, to go to the mission for little Indian children. Of course Miss Clark has a right to say that Leonora must go somewhere, because it is her house, but Leonora does not wish to go to the mission. Therefore Miss Porter and Miss Hunt are willing to go with her into Attica. That is a country not far from here. I am going to send her there because old age is creeping upon me, and I am not able to support Leonora as I did. I call upon any other parents who are present to make a sacrifice like mine for their daughters."

Doris sat down, having finished her speech, to which Mimi and Nancy listened with as much attention as if Nancy had not composed it, with Mimi's help.

"The meeting will unite in singing — unite in singing — What shall we sing?" asked the chairman desperately. "I've thought and thought, and couldn't think of one suitable thing."

"'God be with you till we meet again' would be suitable," said Doris, in entire earnest, and with no intention of being irreverent.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Mimi, shocked.

"Oh, mercy! No, indeed!" cried Nancy, with an irrepressible laugh, for she had her father's sense of humour and instantly imagined how he would look when she told him Doris' proposition.

Rick tumbled over in the hay to laugh his fill while Nancy pulled her lips straight and said, seeing Doris looked offended:

"You know it wouldn't do to sing a real hymn saying farewell to the dolls, and we don't mean to meet again, except when we go up to look at them sitting in our attic. I couldn't think of a thing except 'The Soldier's Farewell,' and that's ridiculous."

"'We Shall Meet in the Sweet By and By?'" suggested Doris brightening hopefully. "Oh, that's a hymn, too, but it never seems like one, and besides, we don't mean to play with them again."

"Sing 'Darling Nellie Gray, they have taken you away,'" suggested Mimi, with a little gurgle of amusement.

Nancy heaved a sigh that was half a laugh and half a real sigh.

"Mimi," she said reproachfully, "we can't help thinking this is rather funny, but we mustn't act as though we did. Because what's the use of making believe if you don't make believe you believe? Now we're the meeting again; I mean I'm the chairman. I am afraid, Miss Hunt, that we don't know more than a line or two of that song. Won't Mr. Lovering play something on his violin that would be suitable, and that we all can sing?"

"I don't know how I can, if you don't know what this meeting knows how to sing, Miss Porter," Rick replied. He took up his violin, nevertheless, and hesitatingly played a few chords. Suddenly, with an inspiration, he dashed spiritedly into: "Fare you well, for I must leave you," the chorus of a college song that everybody, old and young knows.

Mimi, Doris and Nancy took up the air and words with relief — they were wonderfully appropriate, yet cheerful, they felt as they sang:

" Fare you well, for I must leave you,
Do not let the parting grieve you,
And remember that the best of friends must part, must part.
Adieu, adieu, kind friends, adieu, adieu, adieu,
I can no longer stay with you, stay with you,
I'll hang my harp on the weeping willow tree,
And may the world go well with thee ! "

It was such a success that it was repeated, and the three ladies, who were parting from their adopted daughters, felt their spirits lighter for the jolly swing of this song.

" The next thing on the programme," said Nancy, " is a recitation, by the chairman, of Longfellow's poem, ' Maidenhood.' It's rather long and most of it doesn't fit very well, but we had to have it, because it's the only thing we knew of that had anything about ' standing with reluctant feet,' growing up in it. That's the verse we have to pay most attention to." With which introduction the chairman proceeded to recite the poem in her best manner.

" Now," she said at the close of her recitation, " I think resolutions come next. Miss Hunt will offer one."

" I move that it be resolved," said Mimi, jumping on her feet as Nancy sat down and betraying how carefully this meeting had been rehearsed, " That it be resolved that we are all twelve years old on our last birthdays, and go into our 'teens on our next ones. So I move that it be resolved that we are growing up."

"Second the motion," murmured Doris.

"If that isn't silly!" cried Cord, speaking for the first time; she had sat in open-mouthed wonder over the formality of this gathering. "Of course we're growing up! Everybody is, or else growing old — what'd you s'pose!"

"The guests at this meeting are requested not to interrupt," said the chairman, frowning upon Cord. "It has been moved and seconded that it be resolved that we are in our thirteenth year and are growing up. All in favour please say: Aye! Contrary minded? It is a vote."

"I move," said Doris, rising in her turn, "that it be resolved that we are too old to play with dolls and that we put them away, solemnly, to-day in Doctor Porter's attic, where we may visit them once in a while, but not take them back in the same way."

"Second the motion!" said Mimi promptly.

"That ought to have been two resolutions; there's too much in that for one, but it doesn't matter; it makes it go quicker. All in favour —" began the chairman, but was interrupted.

"Aye!" cried the meeting unanimously, without waiting for her to call for the contrary vote.

"Now the only thing to do," said the chairman, rising with a look on her face that banished all thought of there being anything in the least funny in the solemnity of the occasion, "the only thing left for this meeting to do is to bear away the three darlings sitting there."

Nancy heroically set the example by advancing toward Rosamond. The resolution of her air, the tragic note in her voice, the excited, yet gloomy look in her dilated eyes, were too much for Mimi, who, though not usually emotional, suddenly burst out crying.

"You mustn't do that! Really, Mimi, you must not cry!" protested Nancy, whose sense of the awfulness upon them had come fully upon her at this last moment, but took other form than tears. "It has been resolved that we are to do this, and it is too late to change — besides, we've talked this over often enough. It spoils it all for one of us to cry. We must be like the Mother of the Grachii — no, I don't mean her, I mean — well, a Spartan Mother, or a Roman Matron, or any of those great people who sacrificed their children without a murmur when they had to. Now, please stop crying, and get Dorothy, and fall into line."

Nancy's word was law. Mimi bravely choked back her tears, and quietly, though not calmly, went to get her beloved doll from the trio waiting for the girls. Doris followed her, pale and miserable looking, but dry-eyed.

"Well, before I would!" ejaculated Cord, profoundly stirred by the scene, but with a strong sense that it was needless.

No one heeded her. "Play, please," said Nancy to Rick, and Rick began a march. He headed the procession. Behind came, first Nancy, bearing Rosamond, next Mimi, with her Dorothy, then Doris, carrying Leonora, who was the cause of the ceremony, and Cord ended the line, bearing Mildred, whom she held tightly clutched as though she feared separation from her in spite of her own resolution and that no one wanted it to be.

The procession moved carefully down the barn stairs, for the dolls were large and plump, so that it was difficult to see over their shoulders. It went on across the grass toward the house, Rick playing his best, which was a very good best, and the girls keeping time, upheld by his music.

Letty Hetty came out the back door to find out what this procession signified.

"My sakes, children, are you playin' you're Chinese mothers, or out in India, goin' to sacrifice your girl babies? Looks 'sif you had something kind of awful like that goin' on," she said.

"It's not so awful as drowning them, as they do in China," Nancy stopped to explain. She was as fond of Letty Hetty as that devoted woman was of her; Letty Hetty had known Nancy as long as her own mother had. "We are giving up playing with them to-day, and that is bad enough; we are doing it to keep Doris company; her aunt says she must. We don't really enjoy dolls as we did, and yet we love them as well as ever. It's quite dreadful to give them up, but, you see, Letty Hetty, we are getting older — going on thirteen, and we're 'standing with reluctant feet, where the brook and river meet.'"

"Jerusalem Halifax Gentleman, Nancy, you're the queerest little piece!" ejaculated Letty Hetty, as the procession resumed its way, leaving her standing on the piazza, amusement and regret written on her face.

Mrs. Porter was out; the children met no one on the rest of their march, through the hall, up the stairs, and again, up the attic stairs.

Here Nancy had arranged a kind of throne upon which Rosamond, Leonora and Dorothy were to sit in solitude together till, as Mimi said, "their mothers came to get them to give them to their children to play with."

But Nancy had instantly put in a proviso that they should visit the discarded dolls whenever they were minded to do so; she, for one, expected to go up often to see that everything was right with the three.

Nancy had draped the dolls' throne with an old couch cover, and had arranged a sort of veil at its back which should be brought forward and save the dolls from dust.

One by one, without a word, each little girl came up and set her doll in its place, bending her arms so that her hands came into her lap, straightening her feet and pulling her skirt decently down over them.

Then all three stepped back, Doris and Mimi looking to Nancy to be told what next to do.

Nancy wanted to cry, so, being her father's own daughter, she fell back on his methods, and did something to make herself laugh.

"Take hands," she ordered, extending both her own hands. Mimi and Doris obediently clasped them. " Bow, as low as you can, 'way down to the floor," commanded Nancy.

The three kow-towed thrice. The difficulty of doing this, holding hands in a row, took away much of the emotion of this moment of actual parting.

" Down-stairs, quick! " said Nancy. " Wheel, march! Play something gay, Rick! "

Rick did as he was bidden, and ten feet came down the attic stairs on a run. The girls paused in the hall, looking at one another, flushed, quick of breath, ready to cry, but trying to laugh.

" We can get them any time we want to, anyway," said Mimi.

Nancy turned swiftly on her. " No, we cannot! " she cried. " We can't undo it. We can visit them; we will do that, but we cannot take them back. Mamma says it's bad for any one to get in the habit of breaking resolutions; it makes us weak characters, to whiffle round like a vane."

" A vain what? " asked Doris. " It wouldn't make me vain to change my mind."

" Oh, not that kind of vain! Not being vain: a vane, a weather vane, weathercock, you know! " cried Nancy, and this time she did not have to try to laugh. " We've given up dolls, and we have to stick to it. I feel rather awful myself, but I shall not go back — besides, it isn't as though we hadn't begun to out-grow them! But I do feel miserable! Let's play Puss-Puss-in-the-Corner; Cord's here to make just five, it'll fill the corners, with one for the middle."

"I'll have to go back pretty soon. Mercy's going to make me some waffles for supper, if I get home in time to feed her chickens and peel the potatoes for her. I guess I can sit Mildred down here now; I was kinder 'fraid she'd get in that good-by time," said Cord with a little chuckle.

"You ought to say set her down, Cord," remarked Mimi. "I think the Slocums are nice to you."

"So they are, but I guess I help a lot, if I am little. I always did love housework," Cord said.

In a moment she was "it" and with shrill mews was coaxing the "pussies" on the corners to start, her very red lips puckered, her thin forefinger crooked invitingly. When one of the corner "pussies" did start she was after her post, shrieking wildly, her black hair streaming raggedly from its braid as she ran. The other girls shrieked and ran as excitedly; the melancholy of the parting ceremony of the day was forgotten. Yet, absurd as it all had been, the solemn giving up of the dolls had not been without its effect on all three little girls taking part in it. It really did mark a milestone in their growing-up, and placed their "reluctant feet" a little farther on "the river's" side at its meeting point with "the brook."

CHAPTER III

A MORNING DRIVE

DOCTOR PORTER had been called on an urgent case at five o'clock. He came back to a belated breakfast, saw the few patients that came to him after it, and by half-past ten was ready to begin the regular work of the day.

He thrust his head into his wife's sitting-room and raised his eyebrows inquiringly. Nancy looked up and nodded with an understanding so quick that it betrayed the fact of a previous experience of this mute invitation.

" We're just through, mother and I," she said. " We got all through with arithmetic and the French verb for to-day before breakfast, and we've done our history, done our lovely ' travel geography ' and read our German short story since, so I'm as free as a swallow! Did you want me, dearest doctor? "

"Not especially," said the doctor slowly. "But if you insist on going with me driving, it's as good a morning as the sun ever looks upon, and I'm going to stop a minute at Grandma Emerson's, and then I'm going up to the Stone House."

"Oh, I insist!" cried Nancy, jumping up. "I'll be ready in a wee wink. You know I've got to be just a tiny bit finer to go to Miss Allaire's than I would be if it was only Grandma Emerson's. But it won't take me more than the wee wink, even for there."

"Wee wink! You mean a wee prink, you young Worldling! When you're behind such a handsome steed as Tonic, and beside an Apollo like me, who do you suppose will notice whether you wear your dun homespun, or your undone crimson cloth-of-gold?" the doctor pretended to growl.

By this time Nancy had him fast by the lapels of his coat, and she shook him with one hand while she pulled his shaggy head down with the other to a height where she could tousle it.

"Now you can just go and do some prinking on your own account, for you're a sight!" she cried gleefully. "I'm only going out of pity for you, not because I like to drive with you, and if you are not more polite to me I'll stop taking pity on you — so there!" She kissed the broad brow which she had pulled down to her reach, and ran away to get ready for her drive with this adored father, which was as great a pleasure to her as if it were a rarity instead of an almost daily occurrence.

Mrs. Porter sat smiling at this scene, her peaceful face alight with happiness and amusement.

"How you do spoil Nancy, Mark!" she said, just as the doctor exclaimed: "You see what a good-for-nothing Nancy's getting to be; you spoil her, Mildred!"

They both laughed at this duet. It was a standing joke between them that each spoiled their one, beloved child, while both knew the truth that loving, conscientious, sweet little Nancy was not in the least spoiled, but returned their devotion to her with devotion, their tenderness with obedience, their love with love, and while that was true there could be no question of spoiling her.

Nancy got ready as quickly as she promised to, coming down a dainty little figure in the grayish blue which her mother preferred for her, which brought out the grayish blue of her eyes. The doctor had to hurry on his outer coat, detained as he had been by repairing the damage Nancy had done his hair, and she triumphed over him for keeping her waiting after all, in spite of his remarks anent prinking.

So they started off as happily as possible in the low buggy, drawn by the faithful old brown horse who was a part of the family, as well as an institution in Chagford.

"There are two news items for you this morning, Assistant," the doctor said as they turned up the street, having convinced Tonic that they did not mean to go to the post-office just now, always a difficult matter.

"Is it good news?" asked Nancy.

"Yes, though it will mean a great deal of work for somebody, several somebodies, Mrs. Mark Porter as much as any one," said the doctor. "We are to have the hospital; it is decided upon, and there are to be great events this summer to raise money to begin to build in the fall. I shall expect my assistant to work for it, of course."

"She will," cried Nancy. "That is good news! Is the other as important?"

"Hardly as important as the hospital, but interesting to us — Amabel Willis is coming home," the doctor told her.

"Oh, goodness! Is she really coming at last!" cried Nancy in instant excitement. "I wonder

“SO THEY STARTED OFF AS HAPPILY AS POSSIBLE.”

what she'll be like. She's been gone a year and a half. Do you suppose she will speak with an accent? I wonder if she has changed much. She must have, being abroad all that time. I think we, Mimi and Doris and I, will be rather afraid of her. I hope she'll be nice to Rick now; she was pretty horrid when she thought he was a poor boy, but maybe when she knows he has an Italian countess cousin, besides being one of the old Lovering Chagford family she may be nice — or perhaps travelling has made her nice even when one hasn't fine relations; they say it improves a person's manners to travel."

"Nancy, you solemn little absurdity!" the doctor laughed, pulling the lap robe over his assistant by way of caressing her. "We'll be ready to believe Amabel is all we could ask, that the broad ocean has given her breadth of mind. I doubt that you three small girls will continue afraid of her long. Suppose you run into the house for me? Give Grandma Emerson this phial and tell her to take its contents faithfully and she'll have no more of this 'feeling good-for-nothing' that she complained of to me."

The doctor had stopped Tonic at the gate of a small white house, turned the wheel, and Nancy willingly jumped out to do her errand. Grandma

Emerson, grandmother to no one, but "grandma" to all her friends, young and older, was one of those persons to whom a child always runs gladly. Cheerful, unselfish, kindly, affectionate, the dear little old lady lived alone in her small house, but lived in the midst of unfailing love for her that made her connections with Chagford almost family ones.

She came to meet Nancy now as the little girl pushed open the door, which was ajar, and she took Nancy's delicate face between her cool, softly wrinkled hands to kiss it as she cried:

"Well, Nancy Porter, you're as welcome as a May blossom this May morning! Brought my tonic, did you — with that old Tonic of yours! Well, like's not it's all nonsense, my taking it; likely it's only spring fever ails me, but when you're past seventy, dearie, you feel less like letting spring fever run on, for fear it will end in a regular fall trouble. So I asked your father to give me something that would put the other kind of springs back in me. Aren't you going to stay here, my chicken? Doctor waiting? Well, I wish he'd have left you. I made some strawberry cake early this morning that I believe would have suited you for your luncheon."

"I'd love to stay, Grandma, even without strawberry cake," laughed Nancy, "but we're to go on up to the Stone House. Father just told me that the hospital is decided upon, and everybody's got to work hard this summer to earn money for it. And the Willises are coming home from Europe. That's all the news, Grandma Emerson."

" I saw some one had opened up the Willis house yesterday, when I came past it," said Grandma Emerson with lively interest. " I expect they had the Widow Galvin, from over to the Falls, airing and cleaning it for them! And the hospital is an accepted fact! I want to know! Then we can tumble down and break all the crowns a republic allows us, and have a place to get them soldered together! I'm sure I'm delighted to hear it. Tell your father I shall work as hard as I can to raise money for it. I've knit a quilt and laid it away against this hospital time's coming; I'm going to give that to be drawn on chances, though what my dear mother would have said to her daughter's knitting a quilt for raffling I can well imagine!"

" Only think how many things we do that our Puritan ancestors would have thought were dreadful," said Nancy, with a vague idea that one might as well shock Grandma Emerson's mother as forebears farther removed, since they had all passed into the realm of understanding modern consciences.

"I must go this very instant, Grandma dear. Father said you were to take this faithfully and it would make you feel better. Good-by, dear little Grandma Emerson. Come to our house for all day as soon as you can."

"Thank you, Nancy Porter. I want you should come to spend the day with me the first Saturday we can arrange it, so Rick can come with you," returned Grandma Emerson.

"We always just love to come!" cried Nancy hastily kissing Grandma Emerson's cheek, that felt cool and soft, with fine wrinkles in it, like a piece of taffeta that had been laid away not quite smoothly. "It has been disagreeable having Rick at school this winter, instead of doing lessons with me, but papa and mamma say it's far better for him now, and I suppose they know. Good-by."

Nancy ran out of the door and down the walk, jumping into the buggy to make up for the time she had been detained. Grandma Emerson came out on the upper step to see her off and to wave her hand to the doctor in return for his salute with the whip.

"She's a dear thing," said Nancy, settling back into her place as they rolled away. "That little house is so cheery and cute; I love it. It always seems as if it were a tiny box lined with pink; it has just the cheerful look a little white, pink-lined jewelry box has."

"And Grandma Emerson is just like a little pink coral heart tucked away in it!" the doctor supplemented Nancy's simile with a laugh. "She's a jewel of a little woman, my Dame Durden. There are few people in Chagford who haven't known her practical sympathy in trouble which would hardly have been bearable without that brave little creature's efficient help."

"Oh, I know!" cried Nancy. "Letty Hetty says she never could have lived through that time when you were gone, and I was so fearfully ill, if Grandma Emerson hadn't come right there and stayed. She says when things looked blackest dear little Grandma Emerson wouldn't even allow I might die, but went right on knitting slippers for me to wear when I sat up, and those knitting needles were like trumpets to Letty Hetty, calling on her to be brave, too, and cheering her like a whole brass band. Letty Hetty is certainly funny!" Nancy laughed softly.

"Those are the days I never can bear to recall," said the doctor with a frown.

"Oh, I don't know! They make me seem more here to remember them," said Nancy, leaning close to her father as he put his arm around her and held her tight, the treasure beyond all treasures that he had so nearly lost!

Chagford was a pretty town and the drive up to "the Stone House," as the great old colonial house in which the Misses Allaire lived was called, was one of the prettiest drives of the many lovely roads through and around the town. The road wandered in a leisurely fashion slightly up hill, past the lake, which had once been called the pond, but which had been named with more dignity of recent days, past pretty old-fashioned and modern houses sitting back of their lawns. It was shaded all the way by the splendid elms of New England, and by the ghostly buttonwoods, which made picturesque contrast to the bright young May green with their gray peeling trunks.

It had been two years since the doctor had first taken Nancy to this impressive, but then oppressive house, as "a prescription" to the two stately sisters whom Nancy had then called "the shut-in ladies." It had been just such another lovely May morning when she had made that first call. Nancy remembered how afraid she had been, how she had dreaded to enter that solemn mansion, then a dreary house, tight-shut to the outer world, as its inmates had been withdrawn from their neighbours. How changed this all was! Now Miss Dorinda and Miss Belinda Allaire had come back into the daily life of human beings, at least as much as such exceedingly formal ladies could come. Miss Belinda had taught Nancy music for over a year, and the little girl was as fond of the two sisters as they were wrapped up in her. She did not realize how much the doctor's "prescription" had had to do with the happy change, though she did know, in a general way, that the first visit she had made to the Allaires had been the opening wedge, that their interest in "the doctor's little girl" had been the beginning of their renewed interest in Chagford. How far-reaching had been the charm of a sweet child in its effect on the two ladies who had allowed sorrow to warp them, Nancy was too thoroughly a little girl and a modest little girl to know.

"It's very nice to be so glad to come up here; do you remember how frightened I was when you first brought me?" Nancy said, out of these reminiscences.

"Truth to tell, I wondered that you loved me well enough to conquer that fear, Bonny Nancy," returned her father. "I may tell you now that I appreciated your letting me give you as a prescription.

It must have seemed like being swallowed alive, like a modern little feminine edition of Martius Curtius leaping into the gulf! And down at the bottom of the gulf you found good friends and lots of fun! Here we are, Miss Daughter! I shall tie Tonic, so you run up and ring the bell while I'm doing it."

Nancy obeyed. A maid answered the summons so promptly that the door had to be held open for the doctor a moment or so before he came up the steps, pulling off his right glove, ready for salutations.

Miss Belinda Allaire came down immediately, made them welcome, and asked them to excuse Miss Dorinda, who was hurrying the writing of an important letter for the next mail.

Miss Belinda drew Nancy to her, and sat down to talk to her father with her arm still around the little maid's shoulder.

"I came up at once to tell you, Miss Belinda, that the decision to build the hospital has been taken. I wanted to get you interested and start you planning its ways and means — especially its means — at once," Doctor Porter explained his visit.

"It's to be a fair, I suppose?" asked Miss Belinda. "It is always a fair in these cases."

"If nothing better offers," the doctor said.

"Doesn't it seem as though Chagford might build its hospital out of something more interesting than flimsy aprons and useless fancy work?"

"It can!" cried Miss Belinda, with a lively decision very different from her old-time indifference. "What do you say to a pageant of Chagford? She has history enough back of her! And this is a pageant period, to put it alliteratively. I've been thinking of this, if the hospital should become a fact to be worked for. And I think it would be delightful to have a sort of Children's Crusade for the hospital; I'd like to have something charming done by the Chagford children alone, and let the proceeds of that be applied to fitting out a children's ward, perhaps, or to establish a free bed for children."

"My dear Miss Belinda, you are a real fount of suggestion!" Doctor Porter cried, much pleased. "It is too early to decide what great things we shall do, but not too early to make up our minds that they shall be tremendously great. I wanted to set you to planning as soon as possible."

"I'll help as far as I possibly can," said Miss Belinda. "We'll make Nancy work her fingers off! Nancy, don't you want to go to see the Coggs?"

"I do if you think I do, Miss Belinda," said

Nancy. "What kind of cogs are they? Are they new works at the mills?"

"In a sense they are, yes," Miss Belinda laughed, and Nancy saw that there was something funny about these cogs that she did not understand. "I believe I will keep them a secret, these Coggs, till you've seen them. They are mill Coggs, have something to do with the wheels there, but not in the way you think. I'd like to show them to you and Rick together. Shall it be an engagement? To-morrow, after tea, will you and Rick drive there with me if I call for you? I can't show you these Coggs while the mill wheels are in motion; we must go after hours. Will you consent to the expedition, Doctor Porter?"

"Surely, Miss Belinda, though I'm as much in the dark about these cogs as Nancy is," the doctor said. "However, I'll gladly lend my own girl and my acquired boy to you to do with as you see fit, and neither Nancy nor I will pry into the secret."

"Ah, I think I may be allowed a mystery!" cried Miss Belinda gaily. "And, by the way, Nancy, I have another secret to tantalize you — or I hope that it will!"

She arose and brought from a drawer in a tall cabinet a small carved, Eastern looking box which she placed in Nancy's hand.

" Open it, Nancy girl," Miss Belinda said.

Nancy opened it with expectantly fluttering heart. There, resting on pale jewellers' cotton which gave out a faint, sweet odour, lay a gold chain, so fine, so delicately wrought that it fell together in a space no bigger than a hazel nut shell. Resting on the chain, proving to be hung upon it when she lifted it, Nancy saw a ball, bound around its centre with a hoop of gold, a little ball three quarters of an inch in diameter.

Nancy's breath came with a gasp of delight as she took out the exquisite chain and looked at the little ball. Having let it swing into the light she saw that the ball was made of two moonstones held together by the gold band; they were flat on the sides where they came together, and between them was a tiny strip of something that looked like paper.

" The ball opens, Nancy," Miss Belinda said, watching Nancy's face with amused affection in her eyes. " Do you see that little dent in the gold band? That opens the ball, and that bit of paper you see in it has a secret written on it that is worth more than a chart for finding buried treasures. The chain and ball are for you, but you are not to open the ball nor know what is the secret in its heart till your thirteenth birthday — do you think you can wear it and wait all that time to peep at the secret? For not a peep is allowed till October!"

Nancy flung herself at Miss Belinda rapturously. "You dear, dear, lovely Fairy Godmother!" she cried. "Thank you, oh, thank you! It's perfectly beautiful! Of course it will scorch me not to open the ball, but it will be a glorious scorch! I'll think and think, and wonder and wonder, and get quite wild, but it will be the most fun! Oh, how nice you are and how good to me!"

"Moonstones are said to be lucky. You'll see, when the time comes, that these moonstones hold the secret of happiness. I'm delighted that you like the little trinket, Nancy dear," said Miss Belinda, and her eyes showed that she was delighted.

Nancy sat beside her father on the homeward drive holding the moonstone ball in her palm, enjoying its smoothness in the hollow of her hand, and vainly trying to guess what its secret could be.

"I don't know what I've done that I should not be spoken to," the doctor pretended to grumble after enduring Nancy's silence as long as he could.

Nancy rubbed her cheek against his coat sleeve like an affectionate dog.

"I don't either," she agreed with him. "But I'm moonstruck — moonstone struck — and I was wondering so hard I forgot to talk. I'm a very lucky girl, Doctor Porter, M. D.!"

CHAPTER IV

“THE COGGSES”

RICK had little spare time in his busy days. When he had first come to stay with the Porters Mrs. Porter had let him have lessons with Nancy under her own teaching. She rightly judged that the home atmosphere could give more to homeless Rick than school could, and that his fine imagination, like Nancy’s in kind, would gain more sharing her reading of the best English books than from the routine of a longer list of studies than was followed by the little maid.

But now that Rick had been an inmate of the Porter home for so many months, had grown strong as the time lengthened between the present days of boyish health and the old ones when he had been frail and lame, Rick had begun school. The doctor and his wife felt that it would be best for him to take his place among boys, which is as good a way as there is to learn to be a man among men, later on.

When school was over there were few days when Rick failed to pay a visit to poor crippled Lydia Slocum, who had befriended him when he needed friends. Rick had a beautiful nature; he was sensitive and fine in all ways, but not the least of his beautiful traits was gratitude that lasted. It gave Lydia the keenest pleasure she had to see the boy, and with unfailing patience Rick sacrificed some of his play hours daily to her, thus repaying his debt. It pleased the doctor more than he said to see how quietly and steadily the boy fulfilled this duty, taking it as a matter of course, just as he had decided not to go to Italy when Lydia's accident had befallen her and she needed him.

So there were not many hours of the day when Rick was available as a companion to Nancy; she waylaid him the moment he came in after she had returned from the Allaire house.

“Rick, Miss Belinda is going to take us over to Chagford Falls to-morrow, right after tea,” said Nancy, backing Rick against the wall and looking up at him jubilantly — Rick had out-stripped her in growing and she had to look up at him.

“Any special reason?” asked Rick. “Nancy, I could hear just as well if I weren't right against the wall paper, with the table leg denting mine.”

Nancy laughed and released him. "We are going to see some cogs. I don't know what they are, nor why Miss Belinda wants us to see machinery, but she does, and we're going. There's a kind of secret mystery about them."

"Sounds good," said Rick heartily. "But I don't see how there can be anything much to cogs — maybe Miss Belinda has bought the mills, or something like that."

"Rick, you *are* bright! I shouldn't wonder if she had, not a bit, and had put in some kind of new cogs to make it easier for the mill hands to work! 'Twould be just like her," cried Nancy, admiring Rick's cleverness and Miss Belinda's supposed philanthropy.

"Well, we'll find out to-morrow night. Here's another secret! Just look at this lovely moonstone ball, and the fine, fine chain! Miss Belinda gave them to me! And that paper you see in the ball is another mystery. I'm not to open it till my thirteenth birthday, and then I'll find written on that paper a secret worth more than a chart telling where to find buried treasure — that's what Miss Belinda said! If I don't die of curiosity before next October!"

"It surely is a peach, Nancy," said Rick, examining the little ball. " I don't see how there could be much on that tiny thread of paper."

" It isn't a peach, Richie; you think so because it's round, but it is a moonstone ball," Nancy corrected him demurely. " I don't see, either, how there can be much on that paper; that's part of the mystery, I suppose. Anyway, Miss Belinda said what I told you, and she knows."

" She gave you your gold bird on the filigree chain. Seems to me you've more than belongs to you — give one to Doris," said Rick. " I've got to go and polish for supper, Nancy. It's a dandy little ball. Too bad marble time is over for this year. I'd borrow it! Say, Nancy, let me go! I'll be late, honest! Oh, I'll take it back! I wouldn't borrow your new marble, not for a minute. And it is a peach; let me go!"

Nancy had caught Rick and pulled him over — her quickness making up for her lack of strength — and was tickling him to punish him for his implied insult to her moonstone ball. Rick could not endure being tickled, so he cried for mercy and broke away the moment Nancy relaxed her hold of his coat, fleeing up the stairs three at a time to his own room and safety.

When Miss Belinda drove up in the open landau, which had replaced the heavy Allaire coach of two years before, she found her girl and boy companions ready and eagerly waiting for her, not less because of their curiosity as to why they were to be shown cogs than because they looked forward to the drive in the moist warmth, the gray twilight of the May evening.

Mrs. Porter came down to the gate to say how do you do to Miss Belinda, and Doctor Porter came out to hand his daughter into the carriage. Nancy and her father were comrades, as well as father and child, but the doctor added to these two relations a fine old-fashioned touch of a manly man's deference to a lady in his dealings with Nancy which delighted that little lady herself and was sweet for on-lookers to see.

"I trust that you will find your mysterious cogs working well, Miss Belinda," said the doctor. "Look after Nancy, Rick, if anything bad happens to Miss Belinda, or the horses run away so hard that Tom can't hold them."

"Yes, sir; I will," said Rick, jumping into the carriage after Nancy, while Tom, the Allaires' trusty old coachman, smiled gravely and the horses may be imagined to have done so, for Bunker Hill Monument is as skittish as they were.

These horses now gravely turned the landau around and trotted off down the street in their time-approved, steady gait.

"Aren't we going to the mills, Miss Belinda?" asked Nancy, after they had reached the newer town, which was called Chagford Falls and which had grown up around the mills, called into being by their industries. Tom had driven in an opposite direction from the turn leading to the mills, and, with their heads full of the cogs in machinery which they expected to be shown, Nancy and Rick wondered.

"No, not to the mills; we are going to see the Coggs," said Miss Belinda, laughing.

"Aren't the cogs in the machinery?" asked Nancy, longing to ask more, but trying hard to be polite.

"No. They are in a house, not far from here; you'll see!" said Miss Belinda, and Nancy dared not ask another question, but she and Rick linked little fingers to squeeze them, thus conveying to each other their "statiable curtiosity," like the elephant's child's.

Tom plainly had driven here before, or had received clear instructions from Miss Belinda where to go. He drove straight to a small house, "plain but neat," as story books say, and stopped before it, turning the horses to allow Miss Belinda and her guests to get out easily.

"Now, then, girl and boy!" said Miss Belinda rising, but dropping back into her seat to let Rick precede her and turn back to offer her his hand, which he did with his own pretty grace — Rick's was a case that would delight people who believe that we all inherit our traits. In spite of his friendless early childhood Rick was as naturally charming as a little royal prince; his ways were true to the gentle blood in his veins.

Miss Belinda led the way up the narrow path, followed by Rick and Nancy silently. She knocked on the door, but immediately opened it and entered, passing at once into the small front room, with her friends at her heels.

Nancy's quick glance showed her that there was little furniture in the room, but it held such unexpected human furnishings that neither Nancy nor Rick had any thought to spare for wood and stuffs.

Four girls arose from the table around which they had been sitting when their guests entered. A long carton, nearly emptied of the crackers which it had contained, stood on the table, and glasses

"'WE SAW YOU COMING,' SAID ONE OF THE GIRLS."

that had recently held lemonade stood beside it, all pushed together toward the centre of the table. One of the long-shaped, clumsy magazines published for women, and three school books lay on the table; apparently the four girls had been — should one say supping or lunching? It was too early for an after-supper lunch, yet the fare had been too meagre for a supper — and at the same time had been improving their minds.

" We saw you coming," said one of the girls, " but we didn't want to open the door till you rang; it's eleganter. We hoped you'd ring. The door bell's bust — broke — but when it's yanked a body can hear the wire twitch."

" I'm sorry I didn't pull it," said Miss Belinda with admirable gravity. " I've brought friends of mine to meet you. Nancy, Rick, these are the Coggs girls."

Nancy laughed. She could not help it, catching the twinkle in Miss Belinda's eye, at the misunderstanding she had been under as to the other sort of cogs which she had expected to see.

" My dears, this is Nancy Porter, the doctor's little girl, of Chagford proper. And this is Richard Lovering, whom we all call Rick. Girl and boy, two of the Coggs girls are twins and the other two are twins; two pairs of twins there are in this family, which explains their being all four, apparently, the same age. Their names are Mary, called Maizie; Margaret, called Daisy; Teresa, called Taizie; Hazel, called Hazie."

In spite of herself Nancy laughed aloud and Rick barely checked himself with an unnatural sounding cough, at this unexpected jingle of names.

Nancy crimsoned with mortification over her rudeness, but the Coggs girls laughed too.

"Laugh if you want to; it's an awful funny bunch of names," said one of them. "We go along like a count — to find out who's it, you know! This is the way we count when we play something:

"'Maizie, Daisy, Taizie, Haze, Coggs and bogs and logs to blaze;
Maizie, Daisy, Taizie, Hazie, if you're it you can't be lazy, —
I-t, it, go tell the frogs, C-o-g-g-s spells Coggs. You are it!'"

Nancy laughed till she choked, Rick with her, and all four of the Coggs girls with them.

"I never in all my life!" declared Nancy recovering her breath.

"No one else never did," said one of the double sets of twins. "We're a reg'lar circus. We have three pints to every quart of fun, you can bet on that."

Nancy looked at the four girls more attentively. They were wonderfully alike; as Miss Belinda had said, they seemed to be the same age. Each had reddish hair, but with enough yellow in it to make their dancing blue eyes suit their surroundings better than blue eyes generally harmonize with red hair. They had large mouths, strong white teeth, short noses and a general roundness of feature. They were not in the least pretty, yet they were attractive because they looked so wholesome, merry and pleasant. They spoke incorrectly, and in clear, loud voices that carried out the general effect of breezy jollity. They were not well-bred, nor well educated; they did not seem to possess " manners," but behaved precisely as was natural to them. Fortunately it was natural to them to behave kindly, and their freshness was that of the real meaning of the word, not the slang sense — they were not a bit shy, nor afraid of any one, but they were gay and fresh like a west wind, and their easy ways did not suggest impertinence.

Nancy was wondering how old they were when one of the twins said:

" How old are you, Nancy Porter? Maizie and Daisy are fifteen, and Hazie and I are almost fourteen." From which Nancy understood that the speaker was Taizie, and she tried to discover something to identify her by as she replied slowly:

"I shall not be thirteen until October. I see," she added in her thoughts. "This one has dark eyelashes and her twin has light ones. I'll know Taizie next time!"

"Well, you're a nice little kiddie all right," said Daisy heartily. "I guess you seem so much younger'n we do because we've been knocking around, and it's easy to see you're one of the kind that are kept in silk-lined cases."

"Knocking around?" echoed Nancy feebly, feeling bewildered by these strange acquaintances.

"Sure!" affirmed Maizie, taking up the conversation. "Our father died when that other pair was two months old, and mother only lived a year after that. Then we was taken by a wholesale dealer."

"Dealer in what?" asked Rick, interested in this story, like, yet wholly unlike his own.

"Wholesale dealer in twins!" cried Maizie with a laugh; she had expected this question and was ready for it. "She was a good, kind woman, and she didn't have any money, but she took in the whole bunch of us, said she guessed four girls could work for her after a while. And I guess we could, only she died two years ago, before she got much good of us."

"And the biggest thing you ain't heard!" cried Daisy, taking back her office of story teller. "Miss Allaire knows. A lawyer in New York he found out, or thinks he found out, that we're the grandchildren of old Peter Debbs, who owns these mills at the Falls. That lawyer says mother was his daughter. Peter Debbs didn't have a cent when his children was little, so mother she went off somewheres to work when she wasn't grown, and she didn't keep track of her folks. This lawyer says she's our mother — I mean he says mother was Peter Debbs' daughter. So he made us come up here and we're working in the mills while we're waiting to find out who we are. Peter Debbs he doesn't seem to be in any hurry to make up his mind we're his, but if he does find out mother was his daughter he told that lawyer he'd do the square thing by us. We'll have oodles of money then, and we're going to buy a big autymobile car with one of those sofa — show-for men to run it, and we'll show for a heap ourselves. It'll be great! While we're waiting we have about as much fun planning it out. Ain't it killing? Just think of us Coggses rich!"

"We ain't got a red cent now, not a red," said Maizie with a strong emphasis on the last word, as though the case would be better if cents were any other colour.

"It's the queerest story!" Nancy managed to say; she was quite overcome by this remarkable visit, and what she really thought was that these young girls were queerer than their story. But she liked them, they were so genuine and merry, kind, too; affection for one another shone out of their laughing glances as they talked, and the nudges that Maizie and Daisy exchanged to punctuate their surprising tale were eloquent of it.

"If we get rich we're going to have a rousing house right here in Chagford, over by Miss Allaire's, I guess," Taizie said. "We're going to keep house in it by ourselves, and it'll be going some — you watch us. Come and see us — if we get there."

"I have come to see you here; you must come to see me," said Nancy, more and more in the dark as to what was expected of her.

"You'll need some one to look after you, if you do find yourselves the wealthy Misses Coggs," said Miss Belinda, rising to go.

"Now, Miss Allaire, we've pretty much looked after ourselves while we was poor; we're living alone now all right, and doing our work to the mills, so I guess we hadn't ought to have a keeper when we get rich, if ever we do. We want to have fun, and most rich girls get told to don't all the time — we don't care killing much to be rich that way," said Hazie.

But Maizie looked thoughtfully at Miss Belinda and then at Rick, handsome as a Greek dream of the boy Ganymede; at dainty Nancy, sweet, refined, exquisite in every line and motion, and a perception of their own lack stole upon this one of the elder pair of Coggs twins.

"Say, twin Coggses, I suppose we'll have to get a few points if we want to be the real thing," she said. "And by and by, after we'd had our fun, we'd be sorry if we wasn't the real thing. I'll tell you, Miss Allaire, if Peter Debbs makes up his mind we're belonging to him we'll get you to give us a touch of sandpaper where the bumps are biggest — make us more like that, you know." Maizie Coggs nodded hard at Nancy as if she could not understand the allusion, but Nancy blushed and Rick laughed, and the other three Coggs shouted gleefully.

"Bravo, Maizie!" Miss Belinda approved her. "I think you will see more and more that you want something besides fun if you get installed in the big house of your dreams."

"Guess that's why you brought 'em," Taizie said shrewdly. "But they're all right, all right; I don't mind their being all silk's long's they don't rustle themselves."

"Come again!" shouted the double twins, as Nancy timidly offered her hand and Rick shook hands, with the twinkle in his eye that won the merry Coggs.

The four tawny heads nodded and the girls watched their guests into the carriage at the gate, and saw the big horses trot away, before they came back into their little house and shut the door to discuss the visit in all its aspects.

"Nancy girl, you seem overwhelmed," laughed Miss Belinda, as they went up the dusky street.

"Well, you know I was looking for wheel cogs and at first they surprised me — and at last they surprised me more! I never saw anybody one bit like those girls!" said Nancy.

"There is no one like them," agreed Miss Belinda. "They have been poor all their days, so they seem much older than they are, for one thing, and, for another, their poverty has prevented their going to school and has kept them among plain people, who had no idea of correct speaking, and who lacked all book knowledge. Even if Peter Debbs is a rich man, and proves to be their grandfather, he is a plain man, and these girls have not fallen from good family into their poor estate. But they are fine girls; I like them a great deal. There isn't the least doubt that Peter Debbs is their grandfather, and they will be enormously wealthy. I wanted you to know them before this happens; as soon as the old man's obstinacy is forced to yield, which will be soon, these children will have their big house and begin the fun they're planning. If they will take a fancy to you, little Nancy, you can help them by quiet ways to get transplanted. It will be a dangerous time to the four twins; there will be plenty of people to flatter them, use them, but make fun of the mistakes and queer doings for which they are sure to be famous. If you will befriend them it will be as great a kindness as it would be to feed a poor girl — greater, perhaps, for their danger will be greater."

" Of course I will, if I can," said Nancy doubtfully. " I felt very little and girlified beside them. Mamma will help them, though, and show me how. Isn't their slang funny? "

" They are funny in all ways, but very kind and wholesome; you'll like them. You will be a great help using the sandpaper Taizie mentioned," laughed Miss Belinda.

"And to-morrow Amabel Willis arrives!" cried Rick. "Won't that be different, though!"

"She always was quite a good deal sandpapered," admitted Nancy. "Being abroad she must be more so. There are lots of different people in the world, even in Chagford, aren't there?"

CHAPTER V

FROM OVER SEAS

TWO days later Nancy was getting ready to go to see Amabel Willis, who had arrived in Chagford the previous night from her " extensive travels in Europe," as *The Chagford Daily Rumour* put it, recording the return of the Willis family.

Nancy had petitioned to wear her newest suit, though her mother had not thought it necessary.

" Mimi and Doris will wear their best things, they said so," pleaded Nancy. " After this we shall not mind Amabel any more than ever, but when it's our first call on her, after she's been away, it isn't like just going to see her."

Mrs. Porter laughed, but she saw the point, and Nancy was in consequence now turning the skirt of her latest gown and shaking it, lest it might show closet creases.

It was a green that was almost gray, or a gray that was almost green, cool and springlike in hue, and Nancy was greatly pleased with it.

She threw the skirt over the footboard of her bed and examined the coat with its trimming of two braids, a green braid darker than the cloth, and the tiniest edge of black braid defining its edges, and hung that over the back of a chair.

Next she took her hat from its box and laid it on her bed, a soft, drooping white straw it was, with crushed bows of a wide gray-green ribbon that matched her gown. It had the palest blush roses, ready to shed their petals as they lay upon the brim, held in place with a black buckle and knot of black velvet ribbon that matched the braid on the coat and brought out the soft colours of the hat.

" It's a beautiful suit, mamma," said Nancy, with profound satisfaction. " I really think Amabel can't have seen anything I'd like better in Paris." She brought her brush and her broad black hair ribbons to her mother as she spoke and dropped on a footstool at her feet, by her action asking to have her hair arranged.

Mrs. Porter loosened the child's masses of fine dark straight hair from its braids, and gathered it into her left hand to brush it.

" Vain little Nancy! Amabel may have seen many things in Paris that she would like better," said Nancy's mother.

"It's not vain to be pleased when your own mother buys you something you would rather have than anything," said Nancy, though she knew that her mother had not meant the accusation of vanity. "Mamma, dear, we haven't been one bit different since that man paid papa all that money he owed him, and I thought we should be so rich! Will those funny Coggs girls be richer than we are?"

"Oh, my dear, yes! We are merely the luckiest sort of people, removed from either kind of worry, the anxiety of lack, or the anxiety of too much. Those little Coggs doublets will be absurdly rich. You know, dear, I never could burden myself with more servants, or rather with a servant, for Letty Hetty can't be called one! I'm fond of our simple manner of living and I'm anxious to keep my privilege of using my own kitchen. And, Nancy, your dear father does dearly love to be able to give away, and not to send in all his bills! We couldn't deprive him of the happiness, could we, daughter? When you are eighteen if you would like a more ceremonious manner of life, you shall have it, but I confess to a love for simplicity."

"I shall never want anything one bit different than I have it now," declared Nancy. "What makes me love the big house and the stately ways at Aunt Mary Lawrence's, in Boston, and yet love our cozy little ways even better? When I go down there I enjoy all those servants serving me like a princess — I always play I am a princess there — but when I get home and am making cake in the kitchen, with Letty Hetty talking to me, so nice and funny and wise, why, I love this better than a palace!"

"It's a comfort to hear that, daughterkin! Doctor Porter and his wife are anxious to make your home the pleasantest place on earth to you. Turn your head the least bit toward the window, Nancy; I'm tying your bow crooked. Don't you think you're happiest here because you belong here, and here belongs to you?" asked Nancy's mother, giving a farewell pat to the glossy head which she had just adorned with two big bows, one behind each ear.

"Oh, I don't know, mamma! My physician, Doctor Mark Porter, has always warned me against being prejudiced," said Nancy gravely, with a laugh in her eyes. "I think I'm fondest of this house because it's the nicest place I know, with the very nicest lady in it of all the world!"

"Base flattery, Ladybird! Personally I think there is no other sort of flattery," said Mrs. Porter. "I'm sure you are hoping that I will offer to straighten the gathers in your waist." She pulled the delicate white waist that Nancy wore under the bodice of her skirt into place as she spoke, and wheeled the little girl around to fasten her tiny circle of pearls in the fine lace that fell around her throat.

Nancy snapped the clasp of the slender gold chain that held her new moonstone ball, and set her hat on the smooth hair which her mother had just brushed and braided. "Now, if you'll hold my coat, mammady, I'll be ready to go. I hear Mimi and Doris down-stairs talking to Letty Hetty," said Nancy, putting both arms out stiffly behind her. Mrs. Porter lifted the coat into its place on Nancy's shoulders, pulled it smooth and buttoned it for her as if she had been still her baby. Then she lifted the sweet oval face by its chin and kissed it.

"Have a good time, my darling, a happy time and a *good* time!" said Mrs. Porter, as she had said to Nancy all her life on her setting forth.

Nancy returned her mother's kiss and ran down the stairs to find Miriam and Doris coming out of the dining-room to meet her.

"We were just going to call you," said Mimi. "Letty Hetty had to brush me; I took up Bumblebee and got all over hairs — she's moulting, Nancy."

"Of course, in the spring," said Nancy, stooping to give the tortoise-shell cat a gingerly stroke on her own account. "I can't take you, Fred, my duckie, because we're going calling; when Amabel has been home a day or two, and we merely go to see her, you may go," she added to her beloved little dog, who came with imploring eyes and agitated tail begging to be allowed to go.

"Are you ready to start?" asked Doris.

"All ready," said Nancy, noticing that Mimi and Doris also were wearing their very best suits, and with them the chastened and slightly stiff expression that went with them.

The three little girls walked decorously down the path, Letty Hetty seeing them off and at the same time consoling Fred for his denial.

"You couldn't half forget English in a year and a half, could you?" asked Doris after they had gone on some distance in silence.

"I was thinking that, but how could you?" said

Mimi. " You might get to speaking it a little queerly, but you couldn't forget it."

" Dear me, no," said Nancy. " Besides, Amabel has been travelling with her mother and Louise; it isn't even as if she had been alone in a foreign land."

" Well," said Mimi, with the candour that was especially hers, " I hope Amabel has got more sensible and nicer. I never got over her doing what she did to you when she made the Allaire ladies think you were snooping and it was her — she, all the time! She should have grown nicer, seeing Paris and the Roman form, and all."

Nancy stopped short to laugh. " You mean the Roman forum, Mimi ! " she said, walking on. " But don't remember that awful time up at the stone house; I want to forget it, I told Amabel it was all right. I don't think it's quite fair to remember what she did when she was a little girl, two years ago; she wouldn't do it now, I know. Besides, we washed it out. I said: ' Wish. Wash. I-wish-it-washed-out ' to her about it, that day when I went to see her and she had scarlet fever, and nobody knew it, so I got it. You know none of us ever can remember anything when we've said ' wish, wash ' to it."

This was the formula which Nancy had invented, and which she and her three playmates had used since their earliest childhood for the doing away with misunderstandings. Mimi recognized its binding force. " Well," she admitted reluctantly, " of course, but — well, maybe Amabel's come home heaps nicer."

It was not long before they had a chance to judge. They arrived at the Willis house and were admitted by the maid, who ushered them into the drawing-room and said that she would call Miss Amabel. Amabel's visitors seated themselves and awaited their friend, oppressed by this formality.

In five minutes they heard soft footsteps on the stairs. They looked at one another and hastily smoothed their skirts down and sat straighter, an unnecessary movement, for in an instant they were all three on their feet — Amabel was in the room.

Amabel flew straight to Nancy and put her arms around her, giving her a hug that left no room for doubt that she was glad to see her — indeed the hug was too tight to leave room for anything. Then Amabel hugged Mimi and Doris, and then hugged all three of the girls over again, beginning with Nancy, and then settled down on a chair, taking Nancy's hand and holding it fast.

The four friends looked at one another after this, as there had not yet been time to look, suddenly turning half shy and wondering how to resume a comradeship that had been interrupted for nineteen months, and this at an age when interruptions of comradeships count, and a half year makes considerable difference.

Amabel's callers saw that she had grown a great deal taller than when they had last seen her. She had always been exceedingly handsome, and now, although fourteen is an age of "betwixts and betweens" Amabel was a beauty. There was a difference between her and the Chagford little girls, partly in her clothes, more in her air and manner, but there always had been a difference between her and her mates; foreign travel, separation had but emphasized it.

"What's the news in Chagford?" asked Amabel to break the awkward pause following her enthusiastic greeting.

"There isn't anything important that I haven't written you," said Nancy, as the other two looked at her to reply. "There is going to be something new and splendid this summer; I'm glad you're home in time for it, Amabel. The hospital is to be built and we are going to have something magnificent to raise money for it. Nothing is decided yet, but it will be a great fair, or, Miss Belinda suggested, a pageant of Chagford history. Wouldn't that be glorious? Whatever they have it will be fine. We'll all take part in it and it will be exciting."

"That's good!" cried Amabel heartily. "Something ought to be going on here; I'm afraid it will be pokey. Next winter I'm going to boarding-school, either in Boston, or New York, or somewhere like that. Oh, girls, maybe I didn't have fun going around to different hotels and seeing all those queer cities over there! Though some of the places are real pretty. I'm going again after I finish my education. Louise thinks the pictures and statues and churches and things were wasted on me. But I can tell you I saw enough to drive any one crazy, Lots of the pictures aren't pretty; I'd a lot rather have pretty ones than such good ones, but I never will let that slip, because I've seen so many galleries of miles and leagues of paintings that I'd know better than to think a pretty picture was good now, so it's done me that much good. You'll never know Louise unless you see her here first. She's grown up for one thing; of course she is eighteen anyway. And she's real pretty, not a beauty, but awfully pretty and nice looking. People thought she was an English girl when we were travelling; she's rosy and cozy, like an English girl. She's the one for galleries! Mercy, she's knowing! She's read and worked all over Europe, and an American we met over there said she was mistress of all the Old Masters. You've all grown taller and Mimi's just as round and nice as ever. I think Doris has changed most. Nancy, you old darling, you're not killing much taller, but you look ever so much stronger. You have colour now. You always looked nicer than anybody, ever so much prettier than girls who are just pretty. I'm so glad to see you — all of you!"

"Well, we're glad to see you, Amabel," said Mimi, Nancy being at a loss how to answer these comments. "We rather dreaded you, because you used to be kind of — kind of — " Mimi hesitated. She was painfully prone to frankness, and frequently found herself in a scrape, as now, when she began to speak her mind and found that there was that in it which would hardly bear unreserved utterance.

"Airy," said Amabel for her, to her relief, not appearing to mind the imputation. "I'm that way still, I suppose, but I don't care. I'm sure there aren't many people I like better than myself, and what's the use of being handsome and not getting the good of it?"

This made Amabel's visitors gasp. "Well, what's the use of being anything if you're vain about it? It's wrong to be vain," said Doris.

"And silly," added Mimi, whose love of commonsense made this seem almost worse to her than being wrong.

"It's nice to be nice quietly," said Nancy. "Like my mother, you know."

"Or like her little girl," said a voice, and the children turned to see a young lady who had come into the room unheard. She was pretty, with so much kindliness and intelligence in her face that she was also most attractive. She had brown hair and sunny brown eyes, her face was rather thin than otherwise and Nancy, who remembered Louise Willis as a round-faced, rosy girl would not have known her, as Amabel had predicted, except that, finding her here, she knew that this could be no one else.

"Nancy, dear, I'm delighted to see you again, sweetheart," said Louise, holding out both hands as she came forward.

Nancy put her hands into them, and Louise kissed her, drawing her close to do so.

Then Louise kissed Mimi and Doris, and turned to Amabel.

"Why do you sit here, Amabel?" she asked. "Take the girls to your room and show them what we've brought home with us, at least what has arrived. You'd rather go up-stairs and see our photographs and trinkets than sit here, like swallows on the telegraph wires, wouldn't you, Trio?"

Nancy laughed and said that she would, as Mimi and Doris again turned to her to answer for them.

"Come, then," said Amabel, leading the way up the broad stairs to the next floor. Trunks sat everywhere, in the hall, in each room whose open door they passed. Amabel took her guests into her own room, which connected with Louise's. Attractive disorder reigned; beds, chairs, table, couch, even the floors, were strewn with boxes, garments, packages of all sorts.

"I don't know where to begin to show you things," said Amabel. "Mother bought us lots of clothes, things for next winter — styles over in Paris are ahead of here, they say; anyway she got styles that won't change much. You don't want to see photographs. We have tons of them, but they wouldn't be very interesting, would they? Some rainy day come over and spend the day, and I'll show them to you, and Louise can tell you improving things about them; I couldn't. That is, if you want to be improved; I don't."

"Doctor Porter has quantities of foreign photographs," said Louise. "I remember he used to show me them and explain them to me, and I owe a great deal of the pleasure of this trip to his teaching. I suspect Nancy would be able to tell you more than you know about the photographs you have, Amabel."

"That would be easy," said Amabel, as Nancy smiled at Louise and said:

"Father and I go to Europe by dry land, as he calls it, often and often. We pore over the pictures and he tells me what he saw in each place, its history — I just love it."

"You're a lucky little Nancy! I was a lucky little Louise when I was your age, to be told some of those things by that blessed man! You don't know how impatient I am to see Doctor Porter and your dear mother, Nancy!" said Louise.

Nancy beamed. Something was happening to her! She found herself being absolutely charmed by this big girl; she could not keep her eyes from her. Louise seemed to Nancy full of all sorts of gracious, winning ways, and Nancy began to come under her spell with that ardent adoration which a little girl of twelve often bestows upon an older girl, an adoration that has a powerful influence, for good or ill, in the younger one, who copies her goddess with all the enthusiasm of her little heart.

" I must not stay long now," said Doris. " Aunt Augusta told me to come home before five."

" Then I'm not going to try to show you things," said Amabel, who evidently was not in the mood for exhibition. " You come again and we'll take the day for it — it would take the biggest part of a day to see all we've brought home. I'll just give you what I bought for you."

Amabel went to her dresser and took boxes out of her top drawer.

" I bought chains for you and Doris, Mimi; in Florence I got them, because they are almost exactly like the chain the Misses Allaire gave Nancy two years ago, with that bird. I thought you'd like them — I've one for myself," Amabel said, handing Doris and Mimi each a small box with the magic word: " Firenze " stamped on its leather.

" I bought the ornament to hang on them in Rome; you can wear it as a pin, too, if you like. Nancy, I told you I was going to find something nice for you, but I didn't see anything that seemed to say what I wanted it to. But in Venice I found this ring. I don't know whether you'll like it. Louise helped me select it."

Nancy had opened the box which Amabel offered her and exclaimed. In it lay a curiously carved ring, the design wrought by hand with the skill of a mediæval goldsmith. Long folded wings met around the ring and in their tips was held a beautiful opal, not large, but with fire in its heart, pulsing and glowing. The ring was beautiful and exquisitely carved. Nancy hardly dared breathe lest it should disappear.

"The wings mean that you nearly died, because you were so good, coming to see me when I had scarlet fever and you caught it," explained Amabel speaking softly. "And they are folded wings, meaning that you did not fly away to heaven, after all. And the fire in the opal means the love that was in your heart after I had been so horrible to you. Louise found this all out for me, but as soon as she told me I saw that it was just the ring for you. Please wear it, Nancy."

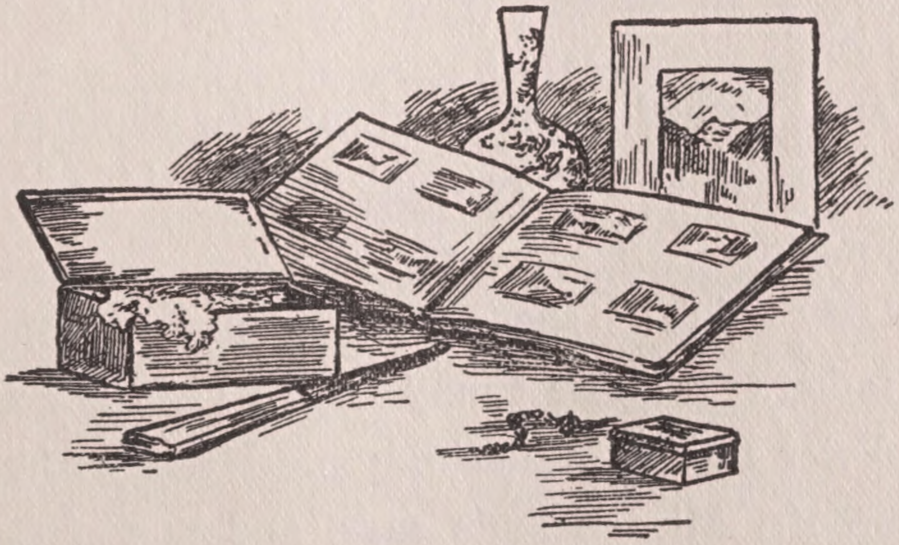
"Wear it! Oh, Amabel, I don't believe you can possibly know how I feel to it!" cried Nancy, almost ready to cry as she took the ring from its box and slowly slipped it on her finger.

"How is that wonderful boy, Rick Lovering, and his violin?" asked Louise of Mimi, to change the subject and give Nancy time to recover from her emotion over her ring and all it stood for.

"Yes, only think!" cried Amabel before Mimi could reply. "We met a cousin of his in Italy and she is a countess! A real countess, and perfectly lovely! The Countess Valtino, she is. She was awfully nice to us when she found we knew Rick."

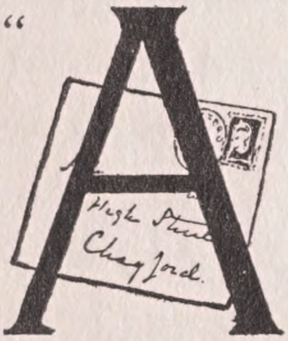
"I think we — I must go, Amabel," said Doris. "There isn't any use in saying thank you, but what else can we say?"

"We can say more when we get our breath and have time to know we're not dreaming," said Nancy, kissing Amabel good-by in a bewilderment of rapture.



CHAPTER VI

THE LADIES OF THE LAKE



"A NOTE for you also, Assistant," said Doctor Porter, giving three or four letters into his wife's hand and reserving a small envelope for Nancy. She jumped up to get it, remarking that she "did not see who could write her, now that Amabel had come home."

"Oh, it's from Miss Belinda Allaire!" she added when she looked at the address. "I wonder if she doesn't want to give me my music lesson to-morrow."

Nancy opened the note, always the shortest way to find out what a correspondent has said, and read the contents.

"Only think!" she cried, offering the note to her father. "Those funny Coggs girls are really Mr. Peter Debbs' grandchildren. He has admitted the proofs, Miss Belinda says, and now they are wildly wealthy. They have bought that great big, showy, queer house up near the Allaire place, on the lake; the one everybody calls ‘Foster's Folly,’ and they are going to furnish it and live in it — just those four girls! It had some furniture in it, you know, so they have already moved in. Miss Belinda says we must come up and see them, — this afternoon, if we can. She says they are warm-hearted, nice girls and that somebody must befriend them now, or nobody can tell what they'll do next. She wants me to get acquainted with them because I won't laugh at them and tell people about their mistakes afterward, and she says they must have some one who knows how to speak, and dress and do all sorts of things, because they've such an enormous lot of money to spend that it will make a great difference what they do. I think I'm too young for them; the second pair of twins is older than I am, but they seem older than they are.”

“I have been hearing about these children for several days, but I waited to tell you what I heard till they were established in their house, and then I thought that we would all go up to see them,” laughed Doctor Porter. “Will you go this afternoon, Mildred? It really is a sort of duty. The Allaires are good women. Everybody would see the duty of feeding the hungry, but not every one would try to guide these youngsters into good taste and the wise use of wealth. Yet this is as great a charity as the other. It will make a difference, not only to themselves, but to the world around them, if they use that great fortune discreetly and helpfully."

"Surely, Mark," agreed Mrs. Porter. "Yes, I will go up there with you. If they would take a fancy to Nancy we could help them greatly, through her."

The doctor shook his head discouragedly. "Nancy makes more enemies than friends," he sighed. "I'm afraid our well-meant scheme will fail."

Nancy ran over and pulled the dubious head, the big head that held so much wisdom, down where she could rumple its thick iron gray hair and punish it with cuffs as usual. "I wouldn't make so many enemies if I weren't known all over the three Chagfords as 'the Doctor's Little Girl;' it prejudices people, because everybody in Chagford hates you and don't trust you one bit when they're ill!" she cried, peering into her father's face to make sure that he understood the giving of tit for tat.

That afternoon Tonic in the surrey took the doctor, his wife and Nancy up the pretty "lake drive" to visit the remarkable new owners of the gimcrack palace which had been built, regardless of expense and taste, by a man who had grown suddenly rich and had as suddenly lost his new wealth. He was a man named Foster, which was the reason that the house, that had been taken by some of his creditors for debt, was called in Chagford "Foster's Folly."

The house rose up out of its surrounding trees — the situation was beautiful and June was making this evident — as the doctor's family drove toward it. Turns of the road revealed and shut it from sight alternately. At last it stood fully disclosed, yellowish, with pointed rounding towers on each corner. Stonework, fancy shaped shingles, unexpected windows, some of them Gothic, some of them rounded, one large Elizabethan oriel window protruding on the second floor, flanked on the corresponding side by a modern French window, all united to make an extraordinary hodge-podge of extravagance and bad taste.

"It does seem a pity that their natural guardians — or unnatural legal guardians — couldn't have prevented these queer little heiresses from buying such a monstrosity as that. But they probably are delighted with it, and by the time they are taught to judge architecture they may have got the worth of its price in pleasure, and get rid of it again," remarked Doctor Porter, gently suggesting a better pace to Tonic. Tonic took the hint and came up the driveway on a trot faster than his usual gait.

Nancy said that she thought it was because he wanted to avoid seeing the cast iron "deers and dogs and things," which dotted the lawn, that he dashed passed them, or "dashed for Tonic," she added conscientiously.

The doctor got out of the carriage and gave his hand to his wife and Nancy in turn, but got in again to drive off, for his duties did not allow him to share this call. Before the surrey had more than fairly turned and started, the door of the fantastic house opened and one of its four mistresses stood within the space: Nancy could not possibly tell which twin it was.

"Well, hallo, Nancy Porter!" cried this Miss Coggs. "Say, you're great to come right up; Miss Allaire said she was going to tell you we was here. We moved in yest'day. Come in."

"This is my mother —" Nancy hesitated, and the girl laughed, putting out her hand, with warmth and perfect certainty of friendliness, to Mrs. Porter.

"I'm Daisy," she cried. "I'd bet one of those deers out there you couldn't tell who I was! Nobody ever can till they get used to us. You're awful kind to come along, ma'm; I'm sure I'm glad to see you. Come right in this way. This is our drawing-room, so they say, but there ain't either of us much at drawing. If I did get at it I'd rather take work like that up-stairs, out of the way, in case we got comp'ny."

Mrs. Porter repressed a smile and Nancy dropped behind till she could recall hers. Daisy threw open the door of the drawing-room triumphantly. It had little furniture in it, but that little was gorgeous to look upon, gilded frames, covered with blue and yellow tapestry, with odd chairs of blue velvet, tables carved and gilded, and a long gilt mirror at one end of the room.

"We bought this house with what there is in it," said Daisy proudly. "We think it's about the finest, but when we get sick and tired of the furniture we're a-going to get stuff of our own, and maybe it won't be worth going miles to see! I'll go call the rest of the bunch; just you wait — please." She added the last word as an after-thought, hurrying away as she spoke.

When she returned it was fifteen minutes later, and the other three young heiresses were with her. Daisy had changed her gown, and they were all four clad in marvellous garments — silks and velvets, princess gowns, each a different colour, with facings and trimmings of still other colours, and jewelry, that was entirely visible to the naked eye, dangling joyfully from each throat, catching up ends of lace and adorning the fingers that were unyouthfully hardened by honest work.

The girls looked so blissfully happy and sure of being suitably clad that Mrs. Porter felt her heart warm to them. They were enjoying the sensation of having money to spend just as children enjoy the riches of a field of dandelions — and they were putting flashy jewelry on their persons with the same lavish delight that children feel in making festoons of the dandelion's golden blossoms to hang over their pinafores. Mrs. Porter was no more repelled by this simplicity than she would have been in the case of the children in the fields. Indeed she felt an instant liking and pity for these girls, only slightly older than Nancy, who had so much to

DAISY COGGS.

learn and whose way would be beset by dangerous friends as well as foes.

"How do you do?" said Nancy, with the embarrassment of her first meeting with the double twins intensified by their splendour. "My mother came to see you with me. Mamma, this is Maizie Coggs, Taizie and Hazie — Daisy is the one we first saw. Girls, this is my mother, Mrs. Porter."

"I am glad to meet you, my dears," said Mrs. Porter. "Nancy told me about you, and I am glad that your wonderful story is coming to a happy end."

"It's only just beginning!" cried Hazie rather cleverly.

"Ain't it just like a story!" exclaimed Maizie. "That's what I say, too. Why, I've been to plays — up in the nigger heaven for a quarter — and seen things not half so much good as this play is, with us four for the leading ladies! Gee, when I think it won't be as hard now for us to buy two dollar seats in the orkrester for all of us as 'twas for one of us to raise a quarter to go up in the peanut gallery — well, now!"

Maizie stopped for lack of words to express how this struck her.

"You poor little girls," cried Mrs. Porter, in her sweet, motherly sincere way that won every child that ever knew her, and made all Nancy's friends agree that Nancy Porter's mother was the dearest one possible. " I can imagine how you must feel! Just like four bewildered little bees, fairly tipsy with the honey you find in a great blooming field that hasn't a spot that isn't loaded with flowers! It's like the happiest fairy story! I'm glad you've found your grandfather and he has found you."

Maizie Coggs and all the other Coggs beamed on Mrs. Porter. They were easily won, for they were friendly creatures, but Nancy saw instantly that her mother had worked her usual spell upon them. And she was right. From this first meeting to the end of their lives these four girls would have maintained against all comers that there was no one on earth like Mrs. Porter — unless it was the doctor and Nancy!

Taizie took up the story now. " When it comes to Peter Debbs, he ain't wild over us, nor we ain't crazy about him," she said. " He only gave in to being our grandfather because he had to; the lawyer showed him 'twas so, and he couldn't get out of it. And we don't know him. He don't love us and he ain't asking us to love him."

" No. He told us he didn't want we should live with him, and land knows we didn't want to be tied up, if we could help it! He told us he hoped we wouldn't make fools of ourselves, getting so much money when we'd been so poor. He said he s'posed we would, though; said there was a saying about putting a beggar on horseback," Daisy supplemented her.

"So that's another reason why we don't want to make fools of ourselves," remarked Maizie dispassionately. "We went to Boston and bought us some clothes." She made a motion toward the front of her gorgeous gown and tried to look modest.

"We got a woman over to the Falls to go along; she was a real nice woman and she never had any fun, nor saw any nice things to wear, I guess, so we took her with us to help us pick out. We didn't buy a thing that wasn't silk, 'cept velvet; we're a-going to wear things like that, even dusting up and cooking."

"Well, I guess we ain't going to cook and dust, Maizie Coggs!" exclaimed Taizie indignantly. "When we can find 'em, we're going to have servants, and chiefs to cook. We ain't got 'em yet, only one woman the lawyer made us have here with us," she added to Mrs. Porter.

"Don't you think it would be rather nice and homelike not to use all the rooms in this big house at once?" suggested Mrs. Porter gently. "Wouldn't it be troublesome to begin housekeeping with a great many servants? You know you are only little girls, after all, and even I — an old housekeeper like me — dreads the bother of servants so much, that we live quite simply and have but one — and she is rather a friend to all of us than a servant! Why not begin easily this summer, and wait to do big things till you've found out what you want to do? Two good servants, and shut off part of the house — wouldn't that be easier? It's so nice to be free from bother!"

"Wouldn't you like to cut a dash if you'd been poor like us?" asked Hazie of Nancy. "I've been kinder 'fraid we was going in too deep, but all of us wants to see things hum. Wouldn't you have a big blow-out of a house right off?"

Nancy shook her head. "I'd rather have everything nice and quite beautiful, but not too big," she said. "I wouldn't know how to run a big house beautifully. I'd rather learn, before I had one, and — well, wouldn't it be nice to study and — and — "

"Copy nice folks before you tried to be a fine lady?" cried Hazie as Nancy hesitated.

"Girls, what did I tell you? Didn't I say you could see, if you kept your eyes open, that we'd got to have heaps of things besides silks and velvets and autymobiles and show-fors?"

"Yes," admitted Daisy reluctantly. "I guess that's right, too. I've been seeing Miss Allaire with my eyes open — and others." She made a wonderful pantomime at her sisters that plainly meant that she considered the young and the older examples before her desirable models.

"Nancy Porter, would you be a friend of ours?" demanded Taizie suddenly. "I mean a real friend, not one of the coming-to-see-you-won't-you-come-to-see-me sort."

"Yes, I will," said Nancy, flushing.

"Now, hold on!" cried Taizie. "You're getting into a job! I know we're going to be a funny lot and I know folks'll say so. I don't want you should say you'll be a friend of us, if you're a-going to be ashamed, and go back on us when we make breaks."

"I don't intend to," said Nancy emphatically. "I like you, all four of you. I'd have to like all four of you if I liked one, for you're all just alike! I'll bring Mimi and Doris to see you — that's Miriam Hunt and Doris Clark, my dearest friends

— and you know Rick Lovering, who is the dearest, finest, real old-time knight of a boy on earth! And I'll bring — " She paused, intending to have said " Amabel Willis," but stopped in time, remembering how snobbish Amabel had been about Rick when she had thought him poor and friendless. " I'll bring any one else you'll like to know, and I'll be really your friend — and I'll take you to Grandma Emerson's, and that's the nicest place to go. Yes, I'll be really your friend! "

The four twins shook hands earnestly with Nancy to bind this pledge.

" All right; that's settled," said Taizie contentedly. " I know that's another piece of luck for us. We all got a terrible crush on you when you came to see us over at the Falls. And no matter if we do make breaks, the girls'll be glad enough to know us when we get our autymobile and the show-for and take 'em riding. And when we get a chief to cook for us, and give parties with things to eat that'll beat anything you can get in Chagford," added Taizie astutely. " I guess rich folks don't never need to be lonesome."

" No, but we want one or two friends that ain't hanging around just for the autymobile and the chief's cooking," said Hazie. " And I, for one, do want we should have the right folks to copy. We've got Miss Allaire now; she's the real thing."

"Will you show us something once in a while, Mrs. Porter?" asked Maizie, with a note of diffidence in her voice that was more attractive than the breezy confidence of her first manner.

"Indeed, my dear little, queer little quartette, I'll gladly show you anything that you will let me show you!" cried Mrs. Porter, so heartily, so kindly that the twins looked as if they could hug her. "You'll be ever so much more than merely rich girls, if you see that you need to learn a little more than you now know, and are ready to be taught."

"That's it!" cried Maizie. "I think we ought to be more than just rich girls. We haven't had our money more'n a week and two days, and we've only got into this house, and been down to Boston shopping once, but I declare to gracious, things don't hardly any of 'em look the same to me! It's awful queer. I want we should learn how to talk, and act, and dress, and run a house, and — yes, sir! and do something for somebody else that's poor like we was. Ain't it funny!"

"It's very, very beautiful that you are feeling this so soon!" cried Mrs. Porter rising and putting her arm around Maizie. "You are going to be kind, true, happy, helpful girls. I'm really thankful to see that you are so honest and so real. For, my dears, it is not all play to have great wealth. The greater one's wealth, the greater one's chance to do good, and the greater the danger of doing harm. We'll strike a bargain on the spot: you shall adopt me, and this little Nancy of mine, and that will mean that you adopt the doctor — and you never could find in all this world a better friend than Doctor Porter will be to you. And you will love him dearly, won't they, Nancy? And we will adopt you, and together we shall make you as safe as you are happy. Because, dear funny, double twins, you will not know till years from now how many chances there were for you to come to grief, getting so much money when the oldest of you was but fifteen."

"Well, sir, if you ain't the dearest lady in this world!" cried Maizie, falling on Mrs. Porter bodily. "You'd better believe we'll strike that bargain! Because we ain't so blind we can't see a thing or two! We don't worry about what we ain't, but we know we don't talk right, and don't know much, and you and Nancy are the real thing

— like Miss Allaire. We're awful glad you'll be friends of us."

The other three girls followed Maizie's example and hugged Mrs. Porter. That warm-hearted woman was becoming quite enthusiastic over these crude children, with their mixture of simplicity and sharpness, their happy satisfaction with themselves and their world, combined with a shrewd sense of other people's advantages, and desire to improve.

"They've been poor and ignorant, but they are not ordinary," thought Mrs. Porter, always delighted to see the best in every one.

"We was going to show you our house," said Taizie turning to Nancy. "It's a crackerjack! Awful big rooms, and hand-painted ceilings and things like that all over. Say, think of it's being the Coggses'!"

"And, say, Mrs. Porter," chimed in Daisy, "don't, please, go to advising us to cut out all the spread! We've got to go some, at first, anyhow; we've been planning it, and we've been poorer'n knotty pine boards all our lives!"

"Surely, I won't! Will we, Nancy? You funny children! But I understand your longing to march to a brass band for a while, and not for the world would I prevent it," cried Mrs. Porter, with such sympathy that Daisy actually patted her on the back, words failing to express her gratitude.

"We can't see the house now, Taizie," said Nancy. "I heard father telling Tonic to whoa."

"Then we must hurry away," said Mrs. Porter. "Will you come to me if you need help?"

"And will you all come to see me to-morrow, even if you don't?" added Nancy.

The four Coggs girls came out to see their guests away. Doctor Porter's face was a study when he saw their garments and their jewels, but Nancy turned back to throw them kisses and to receive them till Tonic had rounded the gateway. Mrs. Porter laughed long, softly to herself, remembering the children and their picturesque manners and speech, their comic grandeur. "But they are diamonds, if they are rough ones, Mark," she said in reply to her husband's inquiring look.

"I like them," said Nancy warmly. "I wonder how the other girls will get on with them, though!"

In reality "the other girls" meant Amabel.

CHAPTER VII

NANCY'S COMING-OUT PARTY

"WELL, Nancy," said the doctor, pausing in the hall to put on his gloves, and arresting his daughter's rapid progress from library to dining-room, "I suppose Tonic and I need not hope for your companionship to-day?"

"No, indeed! I shall be busy all the morning and busier all the afternoon," replied Nancy, flourishing a duster at her father. "I'm going to try to make this a particularly nice little party, because Amabel — oh, because I am!"

"That's a first rate reason, Dame Trot: I hope you will succeed — with Mrs. Porter's help. It's a little more difficult than you imagine, Assistant, to make people swallow their medicine, or administer doses to others. Remember, I warned you! Good-bye, Mortar and Pestle, as well as Assistant — mixing up ingredients for social health!" Doctor Porter laid the hand that still lacked its glove on

Nancy's head for an instant, till she lifted it off herself and rubbed her cheek against its back.

Then the doctor went on his morning way, and Nancy resumed her preparations for an afternoon party which she was giving to launch the Coggs among the Chagford girls. She was not asking many to meet them, only Mimi, Doris and Amabel, with Cord, because Cord would so like to come, and Louise Willis, because Nancy felt the need of her. And, because it was not an every-day occasion, but one dealing with girls who needed nice friends, Grandma Emerson was coming at Nancy's request. Grandma Emerson, Nancy instinctively knew, would tide her over hard moments, should there be any, and, with Mrs. Porter, save the day if it were in danger of being lost.

Letty Hetty was baking for Nancy's guests, making her famous little lemon tarts that she called Chess Cakes — the doctor said, " because they were worth a pawn anywhere, for a large sum, too " — there was no other reason for their name. But called by any name, the girls would have devoured them as eagerly as they did now. And Letty Hetty had made lettuce sandwiches, and set them away on the ice, which were all a sandwich should be, and she had made delicious little thin sponge cakes to be eaten with the ice cream which she had risen at dawn to make — and, as Letty Hetty said: " There wasn't any cream could beat hers, if she did say it, who shouldn't."

Mimi and Doris arrived first, being consumed with curiosity as to the double twins, who were heroines of such a strange story, and about whom the wildest rumours were floating around Chagford. Louise and Amabel came but ten minutes later, and Cord was running frantically down the street behind them, vainly trying to catch up with them before they reached the house.

It was a warm day, the first downright excessive heat of the summer, and Nancy looked particularly pale in her white gown in contrast to the heated faces of her guests. She had taken their hats and carried them all into the small room off the library where hung the portrait of the first Nancy Porter, this Nancy's great-grandmother, the picture that was this Nancy's friend and confidante, for which she cherished a feeling that she would never have expresed to any one. When she was in doubt or trouble she came to sit silently before her great-grandmother's portrait to get counsel and consolation.

Now Nancy neatly laid Mimi's white leghorn on

Doris' sailor — Doris' aunt disapproved of "fancy things" for little girls — and put Amabel's pale blue chip beside them, with Louise's butter-coloured straw alone, because Louise was fast becoming to Nancy a star in the firmament. Cord never wore a hat at all; her black locks would not have been harmed by bleaching in the sun, but Cord would have been harmed, in her own opinion, by one additional burden that she could escape, queer little untamable, gypsy Cord!

"Please teach me to make the girls good to the Coggs," whispered Nancy Porter to her grandmother's portrait, in the half-playful, half-prayerful way that she always had recourse to her.

Then she ran back to the drawing-room where she found her four younger guests sitting in stiff anticipation, waiting for the coming of what might be called "the attraction" of the afternoon, borrowing theatrical terms. Louise was chatting happily with Mrs. Porter of her recent trip, forgetful of the great reason of her coming.

"They're late, aren't they?" said Doris at once. "I wonder if they want us to see the automobile they have! I heard they had bought a car. Only think, girls two years older than we are, or a little more, and the second pair a year older than us!"

"They did buy a car," said Nancy. "A beauty. And papa got them to take Stephen's brother to run it, because Stephen has taken care of Tonic so long we know just how trusty he is, and papa says his brother Elijah is just like him. Papa told the Coggs girls they couldn't drive around without a chaperon, unless they had some one settled and care-taking, like Elijah, to drive the car — not a chauffeur nobody knew. Elijah is a good mechanic, too, and he learned all about automobiles in a Boston garage, and everybody in Chagford knows all about him. So they listened to papa — they're sweet about listening to mamma and papa — and they'll be down in the new car, with Elijah to drive it, when they come."

"Don't you suppose they're late on purpose to kind of show off to us?" hinted Doris.

Amabel sat by wearing a detached and non-committal expression.

"No, indeed!" cried Nancy warmly. "That isn't like them. They'd want to take us all out, but they're not the kind of girls to try to show off. There they are!"

A long, slender motor car, painted a dark maroon, rushed at Doctor Porter's gate, decided to spare it and curved away slightly as it came to a stop. Out of it jumped, one after the other, the four Coggs twins, at whom the waiting girls seized the opportunity to look while Nancy was gone to let them in.

They saw nothing especially striking in this first scrutiny. Nancy had advised the Coggs to wear white to her party, and they had done so. Their hats were large and striking; they were all four considerably awry from the jolting ride down, and they produced the disorderly effect that motors always give big hats, but except for this and that the girls wore long silken coats, quite unsuited to their age, "the ladies of the lake," as Doctor Porter had dubbed the heiresses in their lake-side residence, were much like any other big, blowsy girls.

Nancy took these comers straight up to her own room to repair their hairdressing.

When they came down in a line behind their slender little hostess they were in order. Their white gowns were most elaborate and they wore all their new jewelry, but otherwise they looked well.

Mrs. Porter came forward to greet them, holding Louise by the hand. "We're glad to see you, my dears," said Nancy's mother, quietly, taking the hand of each in turn and kissing her cheek, though the twins presented their lips enthusiastically.

"This is Miss Willis, the Misses Coggs, Miss

Maizie, Miss Daisy, Miss Taizie, Miss Hazie. And these are Miss Amabel Willis, Miss Miriam Hunt, Miss Doris Clark. Children, you know that these are the Misses Coggs. We will play the first game of this afternoon now: You are to guess which is which of the Coggs twins!"

"Pleased to meet you," murmured each and every Coggs in so exactly the same manner that it was comically plain to Mrs. Porter that they had rehearsed this bit of convention.

"Nancy," added Taizie Coggs at once to her hostess, "that new autymobile is elegant. Just you wait till you try it! We'll take all of you riding," she added hospitably to Nancy's other guests.

Mimi and Doris looked pleased, but Amabel drew herself up and turned away her head. Louise smiled and said heartily: "Thank you. That's kind, Miss — "

"Taizie, and cut out the miss," said Taizie. "If we're a-going to be well acquainted, through Nancy, what's the use of miss? Don't mention it," she added suddenly, plainly recalling what some one had told her was the proper reply to a "thank you."

"And, Nancy, Mr. Riggs is great; he's an awful careful, kind show-for."

"Mr. Riggs? Elijah? Oh, yes; I know he is," said Nancy hastily. Her pallor had gone; in its place was the flush of a struggle not to smile.

"We are going to play games," Nancy went on, "that is if you'd all like to, and will say what sort of games you know."

"It's so warm to play, isn't it?" asked Amabel. "I'd rather hear the Misses Coggs tell us about their adventures, shopping in Boston, or something interesting. You must have lots of interesting stories to tell, if you will," she added, turning to the twins.

"I guess we have!" cried Taizie, with her jolly loud laugh. But Daisy was sharper. "The most interesting thing we seen was some animals that done — did tricks," she said. "Maybe you'd like to hear about them?"

Nancy's colour mounted higher. She was glad that Daisy had not let Amabel draw her sister out, but she was sorry that Daisy was sharp enough to see Amabel's motive in asking for stories from them, and she regretted the bad English that she knew would be laughed at later.

"Aren't games more fun than stories?" she asked.

Louise came to her rescue.

"We'll play 'What will you give for my old bachelor's breakfast,' " she said. " We can play that sitting down; it will be cool and easy to learn, in case one of us doesn't know it. Take us out under the trees, Nancy dear — may we go out, Mrs. Porter? "

Mrs. Porter smiled gratefully at Louise as she said yes, so the ten girls of varying sizes started out to the shade of a little grove of maples where Nancy's hammock hung.

" There's Grandma Emerson; I began to think she wasn't coming! " cried Nancy. " Please excuse me a moment. Louise, will you go on with the girls? "

Nancy ran across the grass, around the side of the house, to the gate to meet the little old lady coming briskly up the street, her small silk bag swinging, her step light, in spite of the heat.

" Oh, dear Grandma Emerson, I was afraid you made up your mind you wouldn't play with me any more! " cried Nancy. " Mamma's in the house; she'll meet you in there, but do, please, hurry out to join all the rest of the girls. We're going to play something, out in the grove, and I've an idea we need somebody to hold us together."

" Like flour? " suggested Grandma Emerson, patting Nancy's encircling arm.

" Like f-l-o-w-e-r," laughed Nancy. " I always did say you were like some sort of a cheerful little blossom, dear little Grandma!"

"You little chip of the blarney stone! It must be an everlasting then!" said Grandma Emerson with her merry little chuckle.

Nancy ran back to her guests, and in a few minutes Grandma Emerson came out to join them. Nancy introduced the Coggs twins to her, and watched Grandma Emerson to see how they struck her. Grandma Emerson had a little trick of the lips that betrayed to those who knew her well her impression of new acquaintances.

Now Grandma Emerson only smiled kindly, and the double twins gave their hands to her with a friendly confidence that was winning.

"Your mother can't join you here, Nancy; she is occupied within doors," said Grandma Emerson. "Rick has come in and will be here shortly. Are you going to play games, did you say?"

"What will you give for my old bachelor's breakfast?" asked Nancy promptly, and Grandma Emerson instantly replied that she would "give six slippery shrimps."

So the game was started. The Coggs did not know how to play it, but it is not a difficult game to learn and they all four contributed articles to the hungry bachelor which were desirable, because they were hard to mention without laughing.

But Amabel played disdainfully. Her contribution was marmalade, and nothing could induce her to alter it to something more humourous. Louise frowned at her, but Amabel would not see her. Her listlessness threw a damper on the rest, who started out with screams of laughter, but soon found no difficulty in replying to Nancy's questions without laughing.

"Oh, here's Richie at last!" cried Nancy, relieved to see the boy coming with his violin under his arm.

"Glad to see you again," said Rick to the Coggs' hearty greeting. "I'm sorry I had to be so late, Nancy, but one of the boys got into a scrape, and I was kept to explain about it after school."

"Did you tell on him?" demanded Taizie Coggs scornfully.

"Oh, no; that's what made me so late: Mr. Harding was trying to get me to talk," said Rick, so simply that everybody laughed, except the boy himself, who had not intended to be humourous.

"Do you suppose it is too warm to dance?" asked Nancy.

"It's never too warm for that," said Doris, whose strict up-bringing made her fonder of dancing than the others who could dance at home.

Rick played the violin wonderfully; each year that he lived something more developed of his extraordinary musical talent. Now he shouldered his instrument, softly tried the strings close to his ear, altered a peg or two in the tuning and began to play.

The effect was electrical; even Amabel jumped to her feet as quickly as the others, and put her hand on Mimi's shoulder to dance the barn dance. Nancy and Doris followed behind this pair, but the Coggs girls waited, prancing as they stood, but not daring to undertake it.

"We must dance too!" cried little Grandma Emerson. She had watched the children too often not to be familiar with the dance, even if in her younger days she had not learned the military schottische which has reappeared under the less picturesque name.

"I'll show you! Little running steps, in time to the music, and then a little kick, not too much, lively, but not rough. Watch them. Now you try it."

The kind little old lady, who never would grow old, actually took Maizie Coggs' hand and started her down the grass, putting her through the steps fairly successfully.

Maizie transferred herself to one of her sisters, and the other two started together, but Nancy dropped Doris's arm, and bidding her dance with Taizie, she herself took Daisy for a partner, Louise danced with Hazie, and Grandma Emerson, heated and short of breath, bravely resumed work with Maizie, till that kindly girl said:

"Now, I've got it down fine. Don't you dance one more step. Go get cool. You're awful kind; thanks. I'll take Cord, now you've learned me."

Grandma Emerson was glad to be released, and sank panting into her chair. The girls kept on dancing till they, too, were tired and dropped into lounging positions on the grass. Richard kept on playing. There was something in his music of the quality of the Pied Piper's; it set feet in motion.

"Oh, say, keep that up!" cried Daisy Coggs, leaping up. "We'll show you something great. It ain't a real dance, not a dancing-school dance. We learned it off some Hungarians where we used to live. That music's just right. Keep it up! Come on, Coggses!"

"The Coggses" certainly came on. Rick was playing a mazurka, classical, yet full of the wildness of the steppers, and its magical rhythm bewitched the twins.

They danced — and how they danced! Swinging, swaying, flinging arms, sometimes leaping a little way off the grass, sometimes throwing their feet out in gay little kicks — their audience had never seen anything like it.

Doris and Mimi and Cord watched this dance, literally open-mouthed with admiration, Nancy marvelled, half admiring, half doubtful of it, altogether dreading the judgment of Amabel, who looked on scornfully, not trying to conceal her opinion that this was hardly a civilized dance.

When the twins ended with a final mixture of all their dizzy motions Nancy murmured a troubled "Thank you." Mimi, Doris and Cord applauded. Amabel turned her head away and shrugged her shoulders, but Grandma Emerson said kindly:

"You are wonderfully good at imitating, children. That's an interesting thing to see; I guess it's just the way the Hungarians danced it. You're going to make the best dancers of any of the Chagford girls, when you've learned their dances."

"Oh, yes!" cried Louise. "If you can copy a wild Hungarian dance like that, none of us will stand a bit of chance to equal you. But we won't be jealous! Suppose we have a dancing class of our own, just we who are here, this summer, then you can pick up dancing without any bother — if Rick will play for us?"

"Surely I will!" cried Rick.

"Thank you; you're awful good," said Maizie faintly. The four were instantly aware that there was something about the Hungarian dance that these new acquaintances did not like, and they were grateful for a championship which they felt, but did not understand, in Grandma Emerson and Louise's suggestion.

"Louise, don't you think we had better go home now?" said Amabel haughtily.

"You may go, if you are not well," said Louise, trying to have Amabel alone see the stern look she gave her.

"Oh, Amabel!" began Nancy, but at this moment there opportunely appeared Letty Hetty and the girl who was helping her, bringing out damask and china in baskets, while old Mr. Marsh, the "extra hand" of several Chagford neighbours, and Stephen, followed, bearing a table.

Amabel said no more of going home, and Letty Hetty and her assistant spread a charming tea upon the shining white cloth, one to which even Amabel, the magnificent, did ample justice. Nancy served her guests, with her mother's help, and tried not to see, with a feeling that her not seeing would keep less kindly critics from noticing that the Coggs girls ate the small sandwiches in not more than three bites, and turned over their teaspoons to be sure of getting every drop of Letty Hetty's ice cream, as well as scraped their saucers to be sure of it.

"Oh, dear, if only things did not matter so much! How can they know, and they aren't really rough!" thought their distressed little hostess.

Grandma Emerson, Mrs. Porter and Louise exerted themselves to make the new girls feel at ease. Mimi, Doris and Cord stared at them with no unkind nor rude intent, but because they found it absorbing to see bejewelled hands, such as they had never seen belonging to any one, much less to young girls, doing such uncouth things.

When the table was cleared away, once more Rick played for dancing.

"A Virginia reel would be nice, wouldn't it?" suggested Nancy hopefully.

"Yes; we can all dance that," said Mrs. Porter. "Here is your father, Nancy; make him come in too."

Nancy ran over and pulled the doctor into the line. "You dance with Hazie Coggs, mamma; I want the doctor myself — no, I don't! Papa, take Maizie and do your best," she cried.

"I'll obey — Mimi, what's the matter?" exclaimed the doctor.

CHAPTER VIII

KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS

MIMI had been pirouetting alone, to the lively air that Rick was softly playing for Doris and Cord to do what Cord appropriately called " stunts."

Cord was flax to the Coggs torch. Always the most active and restless child imaginable, she never was able to find anything sufficiently energetic to work off her bubbling spirits. The Coggs' dance and the Coggs' breeziness and splendour struck her as nearer what she wanted than anything she had ever happened upon.

Now, fired with the desire to do as they did, she was pulling sober, rather severe Doris around in a series of wild motions all her own, while Mimi, aroused, too, by Rick's playing and what she had seen, was pirouetting fantastically in a solo dance. When Doctor Porter had asked what was the matter Mimi had just swung around three times, and had then collapsed on the ground with a low cry.

The doctor hurried over to her, followed by his wife, Nancy and all her guests.

"What is it, Mimi?" asked the doctor, trying to help her up.

But Mimi only moaned: "My foot — my ankle! It's sprained, or something. I can't get up."

The doctor lifted her and carried Mimi into the house. Mrs. Porter took off her slipper and stripped off her stocking. The ankle was sprained; already it was swollen and reddened. Mimi's dancing had been too gay; she had turned her ankle and sprained it, not severely, but enough to end any more antics for her for some days to come.

Doctor Porter bandaged the wounded member. "There," he said, straightening himself as he fastened the outer bandage, "there, Miss Mimi; now for a few days you'll sit quietly meditating on the uncertainties in life, and you will not indulge in any more fancy steps — nor plain ones, either — till that abused muscle gets over this."

"Isn't it queer how quick it happened!" sighed Mimi. "It feels all right, now it's bandaged, if I don't move it. You needn't look so sorry, Nancy. I won't have to recite Friday afternoon in school, and I do despise speaking! Go on with the party; I'm all right here."

"We won't go on with anything, will we, Nancy?" Taizie Coggs spoke up decidedly.

"What we'll do, us twins, both pairs, is go home right off and take you along in the auty-automobile, Nancy said we should call it. We can all go, if your friends want to go. That little Cord can sit on one twin's lap and Doris Clark can sit on another, and the other Coggs can sit on the lap of the Coggs that's left over — and that'll leave a seat for the Willises, one for each of 'em."

"No, thank you, for my part," said Amabel frigidly.

"You are as kind as you can be to be willing to crowd us all in," Louise hastily interposed, trying to cover Amabel's answer, "but I'm going to the library on my way home to-night, and we'd like to walk, after Nancy's sandwiches and cakes!"

"You'll let us take you home, won't you?" Maizie begged Mimi and Doris.

"Thank you ever so much," said Mimi. "But please don't cut short the party for me. I'd like to lie here till it's time to go; I'm as comfortable as I can be."

"We wouldn't enjoy dancing and fooling, thinking you're outer it and couldn't have fun with us," said big Maizie heartily. "It's awful mean it happened, but we'd heaps rather take you home now; it wouldn't be any fun thinking you heard us cutting up and was outer it. I guess we'll be going, Nancy. Hazie, go find Mr. Riggs and tell him please to come around for us now."

"I'll go call Elijah," interposed Letty Hetty. "He's out visitin' Stephen."

"You are dear, kind girls," said Mrs. Porter, taking the four Coggs twins to get their big hats and long, grown-up silken coats.

Nancy lingered beside Mimi, surveying her anxiously, as if to see by her face how severe the ankle sprain was.

"Aren't they kind and nice!" she cried. "They wouldn't enjoy dancing any more, they're so sorry about this."

"It's just dear of them!" agreed Mimi and Doris. "They are very nice, underneath, and they'll learn," added Mimi on her own account.

"Well, I must say I don't want to be a missionary," said Amabel, with her most high and mighty air.

"I've been just dying to ride in a machine and I never did!" cried Cord ecstatically. "The only automobile I ever knew was the one that ran over me that time, and I've always been crazy to be on top of one."

"It certainly is much better than having one on top of you, Cordie!" laughed the doctor.

The Coggs reappeared, pulling on gauntlet gloves. Long veils floated now from their immense hats, partly covering the flowers. Their rosy faces and their ruddy, undisciplined hair showed from under the broad brims and flowing veils, looking younger, more childish than usual for being thus framed like older faces, and surmounting such modish adults coats.

"All ready?" asked one of them. "Doctor Porter, if you can get Mimi into the car without hurting her we'll just squash in any old way, so we won't crowd her. Then Mr. Riggs won't run fast, to jolt her. Ain't it funny a man named Riggs drives out girls named Coggs — all the g's there is, pretty near! We can't seem to say Elijah." Doctor Porter lifted Mimi and carried her down to the car, depositing her carefully on the back seat.

"We've had a fine time," said Maizie. "Good-dy, Mrs. Porter, good-by, Nancy. Say, Mrs. Emerson, would you go riding with us, some day? We Coggses love you."

"Why, bless your hearts, isn't that a pleasant hearing?" cried Grandma Emerson. "I'd be delighted to go riding, in that splendid car."

"Then you're a-going!" declared Taizie. "We're going to give everybody fun, if they'll take it. We're coming after Letty Hetty, some day. We'd be glad to take the Willises." She looked doubtfully at the elder and younger sister. Amabel did not reply, but Louise said warmly:

"How nice it is to want to share your happiness! I'll be glad to drive with you; thank you, ever so much. And I'm coming to see you — may I?"

"Well, I should say you could come!" cried two or three twins together.

"Say, Doctor, it won't hurt Mimi to ride a little ways, just sitting still, will it?" asked Daisy.

"Not a bit!" the doctor told her.

"Then we're a-going to take a ride first!" cried Daisy jubilantly.. "It's easy to see Cord's crazy for it, and we know what 'tis not to get fun when you're little, and crazy for it. Good-by, everybody; come see us. We've had a fine party, Nancy."

"So long!" cried all four twins, as they rolled away, Cord bouncing up to wave her hands, both hands, in the great joy of a dream realized.

"Generous, kind girls!" said Grandma Emerson.

"I believe everybody they know'll have a share in their good things as long as they live."

"I'm perfectly sure of it," said Doctor Porter. He spoke heartily and glanced at Amabel. "If one must choose between good hearts and good English there ought not to be any hesitation: one can be taught, but the other is a gift from heaven."

"They are genuine and good," said Louise. "But how dear you are, you three Porters, to help them to fill their place in the world!"

"Well, they make me tired," said Amabel decidedly. "I don't see why such common people have money. The way they talk and their manners!"

"Just you give them time, Amabel Willis," said Grandma Emerson. "And which manners did you mean? Small ones at the table, or big ones like taking Mimi home and giving Cord the ride she was hungry for?"

"Amabel has more to learn than the nice, funny Coggs girls, Grandma Emerson," said Louise. "And they know that they need lessons, whereas she doesn't, so they are wiser than she, if not more learned. Come, Amabel; we must bid Nancy good night."

Nancy went into the house with her mother, the doctor going down the street to take Grandma

Emerson home and to see that the Willises arrived safely.

"We haven't had our hour to-night, mamma; can't we have it now?" asked Nancy.

The hour of twilight had been her hour with her mother since she was a baby; Nancy never liked to be defrauded of it.

"Part of it," said Mrs. Porter, drawing Nancy to her side on the willow piazza lounge. "Was the party a success?"

"The party was, but Amabel wasn't," said Nancy, with a little laugh. "She is so rude that I could hardly keep from asking her how she really could think any one else had bad manners! As though not knowing could be like being rude purposely!"

"Fortunately you did keep from it, else you might have been rude too, being her hostess!" laughed Mrs. Porter. "I hope the Coggs children did not mind her folly; they did not seem to, and Louise was charming to them."

"You never could tell, if they did mind it," said Nancy. "Louise is always charming. Mother Porter, I'm just crazy about Louise Willis! I hope I'll be half as nice and fine as she is, when I'm eighteen!"

"Daughter Porter, I hope that you will be at least half as nice and fine, though I'd like it to be wholly so, if you can manage it!" said Mrs. Porter.

"Shouldn't you suppose, as often as we've all heard about kind hearts being more than coronets, Amabel would see straighter!" cried Nancy, going back to the first subject.

Rick had dropped into the hammock at the other end of the piazza, unseen by either mother or daughter. Out of its Mexican red and green and gold he now spoke unexpectedly.

"The Coggs have both, haven't they?" he asked. "Kind hearts there's no doubt about, and isn't a lot of money the same thing in America as a coronet? Cheer up, Nancy. Remember how Amabel snubbed me when I first turned up here, and to-night she was perfectly balmy to me, told me she had met 'my cousin, the Countess Valtino in Italy.' My, but it is funny!" And Rick laughed the quiet laugh of pure enjoyment, quite free from malice.

Doctor Porter came up the street at a brisk pace; the three people who loved him — for Rick worshipped the big man who was also in his quiet way a great man — recognized his step long before he came in sight, and that he was walking as he walked when he was thinking hard of an interesting "case."

"Assistant," said the doctor the moment that he reached the piazza, "I am going to take you with me to-morrow morning. I have been sent for to visit a young woman in North Chagford, and you shall go with me, if we can persuade your stern other-parent to let you have lessons after lunch, instead of after breakfast."

"Oh, dear," sighed Mrs. Porter. "Nancy will grow up disgracefully ignorant, you steal her from her lessons so often! But I suppose I must let you have your way."

"She shall recite the table of two-times to me all the way over, and the three-times all the way back, Mildred, so that she may lose nothing," declared the doctor.

"If the child is going to school in the fall it is bad enough; I'll take her with me while I may. I received the message through a boy who had been sent to ask me to go in the morning to see a young woman at North Chagford who is a stranger in town and seriously ill. The boy, on his own account, told me that he thought she was going to die. She knows no one here whatever."

"And you are taking Nancy in case she is lonely, hoping that a little girl of twelve may be better than no one to befriend her?" asked Mrs. Porter, knowing how the doctor "prescribed" Nancy, as he himself put it, to patients whom he thought her sweetness and gentle sympathy might unconsciously benefit — often he "prescribed" her with wonderful results.

"Well, sometimes loneliness is the root of apparently fatal diseases, and it is one that medicine cannot reach — at least medicine in a bottle," admitted the doctor.

In the morning Nancy started out with her father, delighting in the drive, in his perfect companionship, dreading the visit before her as any sensitive child would have dreaded it, but keeping the dread to herself, as behooved the doctor's daughter and "his assistant."

"Perhaps I ought not to interrupt the regularity of your studies, Assistant," said the doctor apologetically, breaking the silence with which they had started out. "But I can't help feeling that you do get something on these drives that text books can't give you — and I want you greatly!"

"Why, Daddy-Doctor," cried Nancy, "of course I do! I can feel the wisest things just flowing into me! Of course French verbs and all those things you have to grind over, but look at the great English things you teach me when we drive — Shakespeare and all the poets! And how we talk and talk, of history, and science and people, and all things — even of God!" Nancy lowered her voice reverently. "Daddy-Doctor, I'll be old before I really know all you teach me when you and Tonic and I go along the road!"

"Nancy, child, I like above all things to hear you say this, and I half believe it is true, or I hope I wouldn't let this be so much of your education," returned the doctor, drawing Nancy to him with his usual motion that combined one embrace with several pats.

The drive to North Chagford was out in the direction of the country, for North Chagford was that portion of the Chagford townships which was the farming district. For this reason Nancy liked the drive, on the whole, best of any. It was peacefully pretty, the road running along past plain houses, white with green blinds for the most part. There were pretty orchards all along the way, tidy front yards, and everywhere flower beds and shrubs in bloom, peonies and the graceful bleeding heart predominating.

The small farm to which Doctor Porter was bound lay on the farthest side of North Chagford. He and Nancy jogged on to it, entertaining each other with bits of conversation, sometimes a recitation, for the doctor knew vast amounts of the best English poetry, and he and Nancy often tested each other's memories of poems, and sometimes Nancy sang snatches of songs in her sweet little voice, for Nancy had the musical gift.

Thus, delightfully, they arrived at their destination and the doctor tied Tonic to the hitching-post at the gate. Then the doctor, taking his satchel in one hand and his daughter in the other, walked up the long front walk to the house. He went at once to his patient, while Nancy sat in the high-backed wooden rocker in the sitting-room to await his return.

After a half hour of waiting her father reappeared and called her. "Come, Assistant, please," he said. "I want you to see my patient. And, Nancy dear, try to interest her. She is not sick, except sick at heart, discouraged and lonely."

Nancy arose at once, but with shrinking from the task before her. Her father saw this, and took her hand, appreciating the silent acceptance of her duty which was part of gentle Nancy's strength.

"'IT IS GOOD TO SEE A LITTLE GIRL,' SHE SAID."

He took her into an inner room on the lower floor, and there, seated in a large armchair, Nancy saw a young woman, still in her twenties, pale and thin, with great hollows under her dark eyes, her lips drooping, her entire effect that of one whose strength was far spent.

"Miss Drummond, here is my little girl. Nancy, this is Miss Rhoda Drummond, whom I have been called to see. She doesn't feel as strong as she soon will, when she has taken all my prescriptions. Please tell her what a skilful physician your father is," said the doctor.

"I hope you will be better very soon," said Nancy, going up to the invalid and offering her hand. "It is true that papa cures everybody."

"Does he?" asked Miss Drummond. "Does no one die in Chagford?"

"Not when papa can help it," said Nancy, and the patient smiled.

"I am glad that he brought you with him; it is good to see a little girl," she said.

"Are you very lonely here, not knowing any one?" asked Nancy gently.

"Very," said Miss Drummond, turning her face away.

"I will come every time papa visits you, if you like," said Nancy. "I could come and read to you. I know a lovely girl, eighteen, who would be better than I to come. Perhaps you would like to know her? Then you wouldn't feel alone here, because, you see, you wouldn't be alone; you would have one friend — and me!"

"You dear little thing!" said Miss Drummond. "Doctor Porter, I may as well tell you the truth," she added, turning suddenly to the doctor. "I am ill, it is true, but it is from nothing but worry — that and desolation! I am entirely alone in the world; except an excellent education, I haven't one particle of capital to begin life on, and my strength has given out. You can't cure me unless you can find me work."

"My dear Miss Drummond, you must get stronger —" began the doctor, but she cut him short.

"I can't be stronger when I know that I am almost out of money. I can't stay here more than a week longer, and I can't pay for your visits to cure me," she cried.

"My fees can easily wait; that need not distress you," said the doctor. "What sort of work —"

"Daddy, dearest," cried Nancy, interrupting her father in her turn, her cheeks crimsoning, her eyes flashing with a brilliant idea. “ There are the Coggs twins ! ”

“ Where ? ” asked the doctor, looking toward the window.

“ No, no ! Doctor-Daddy, where are your wits ? ” cried Nancy. “ Don’t you know they need some one to live with them, teach them everything ? Couldn’t Miss Drummond — ” Nancy paused, afraid to go too far with the suggestion involving this stranger in her presence.

“ Nancy, is it any wonder that I have taken you for my professional assistant ? ” cried the doctor. “ Miss Drummond, there are four children here who are born of plain people, are quite ignorant of books, customs, school training, but who are lovable, kind, good, and have come into fabulous wealth. As Nancy says, they need a companion, a guide and teacher and friend. If you could give me the references necessary for one who would be placed in such a responsible position, to form the minds and to guide girls of about fifteen, I am sure I could place you with them. Would you be willing to take such a position ? ”

For answer Miss Drummond burst out crying, but the doctor, and Nancy, also, saw that it was the sort of crying which did more good than medicine.

" I can give you all the references you like," said Miss Drummond, struggling to be still. " My mother died when I was a baby, but my father was a wealthy man, whose entire property was found to have been swept away when he died, three years ago. I have a good education and am accustomed to society. Oh, you could not have helped me as your little girl has done, however wise a physician you may be ! "

Nancy laid her hand on Miss Drummond's knee. " And you will like the Coggs twins," she said earnestly. " It is just as Rick said ; they have the kind hearts which are more than coronets, but their wealth is a kind of coronet too. And I know how glad they will be if you will live with them."

CHAPTER IX

"THE WARM ELASTIC PORTER HOUSE"

DOCTOR PORTER and his assistant drove away, leaving the new patient greatly cheered, better already for seeing a ray of hope, but so excited that she was in need of rest.

"Comfortable, Assistant?" inquired the doctor caressingly. "Do you know, ladybird, stupid though it was, I never once thought of those rough diamonds in "Foster's Folly" when I was casting about in my mind for some suggestion to make to that sick girl! Yet it's the very thing. I am grateful to you for hitting upon it. I had a talk with this new patient before I called you, of course. She is dangerously ill, in the sense of being badly broken down, but there isn't one thing wrong with her, as she said, except bearing a burden beyond her strength. Still many a one has died of that complaint, especially women. She came to North Chagford expecting employment here, and it failed her.

She was already at the breaking-point and she broke. Her slender store of money is spent: you heard her say that she could not stay on where she is. She strikes me as a well-bred, refined girl — you liked her, little Assistant?"

The doctor asked the question, sincerely desirous of a reply. He had great faith in Nancy's instinct: she was apt to be right in her likings and dislikings; she had a divining rod for trustworthiness beyond her experience of what constituted it.

"Oh, I like her very much indeed," said Nancy heartily. "And I think she is pretty when she is well, and her face looks as though she had read a great deal."

"How do well-read faces look, Nancy? Crimson?" asked the doctor.

"Well, they never look green," retorted Nancy instantly, to the doctor's delight, for he liked to have her get the best of him. "My joke is every bit as good as yours, sir!"

"It's the same one," cried the doctor. "It takes its colour from mine. Do look at Tonic's tail switch! He never did like puns!"

"He switches because they fly so fast he thinks it must be fly time!" cried Nancy, bouncing in her seat and actually butting her father with her head in her enjoyment of their nonsense, like a happy sheep.

"Nancy, Nancy, such brilliance is uncanny!" protested Doctor Porter. "Let us resume our serious conversation. I am delighted that you suggested Miss Drummond's going to the new Dollar Princesses, the Ladies of the Lake; it will work good mutually."

"Yes," said Nancy absent-mindedly. "Daddy, dear, I was wondering, if she can't stay on where she is, how Miss Drummond will get ready to take that place?"

"True again, Assistant! Oh, for the Chagford Hospital, and a convalescent ward!" said the doctor.

"If mamma thought it right, wouldn't it be rather nice to invite her to make us a little visit? Letty Hetty's cooking would make her strong," suggested Nancy.

"Nancy, you are your mother's own daughter! She always wants to take in everything worn-out and hungry, whether it be biped or quadruped, feed it and rest it into health," exclaimed Doctor Porter, his eyes warm with the gladness it gave him to know that his one little daughter was growing up like her great-hearted mother.

But Nancy turned the tables on him. "How about that father of mine who goes, winter and summer, curing and helping people, and won't ever send a bill for half he does?" she demanded.

"'The night is fine,' the Walrus said:

"'Do you admire the view?' That was a neat way he had of turning the oysters' embarrassing conversation into better channels," said the whimsical doctor. "Nancy, I'll tell you once more what I've told you often enough before: Life is not easy for most people. I want to make it easier for a few while I am passing through it. I shall not leave you an inheritance of wealth, as perhaps I might have done had I been more penny wise, but I have an idea you will be no poorer, but richer, in better wealth than money, if I am not too insistent on the bills of those patients who cannot afford to be ill."

"My dearest Doctor-Daddy," cried Nancy, "there will be enough for me: I shall not care to be rich. I'd rather be as proud of you as I am, for these beautiful, dear things you do, than have a million! When we drive along and people say: That's Nancy, 'the doctor's little girl,' I know it's kind of like blessing me, for your sake, and that will make me rich."

" Little daughter, dear little daughter! " said the doctor softly.

Nancy laid her head on his shoulder and they drove the rest of the way silently.

Arrived at home, Nancy ran into the house by the side door, startling Bumblebee, who lay purring in the sun, and waking Fred into rapture at her return.

She paused, hearing voices in the library, and looked inquiringly at Letty Hetty for information as to their owners.

" Some of the Coggses are in there, two of 'em," explained Letty Hetty. " They came down quite awhile ago. Your mother's talkin' to 'em."

" How lucky! " cried Nancy. " I've something to tell them that can't wait."

She ran through the house, but stopped in the library door. There sat Maizie and Taizie Coggs with her mother, and the girls' faces were exceedingly red, their hair more than usually frowzy. There was a general air of perturbation about them that Nancy was quick to note.

" Hallo, Nancy! " cried the representative of each pair of twins, brightening at the sight of her. " We've been here so long that we was just going."

" Hallo! " echoed Nancy. " You can't go now, for I've something so interesting to tell you that I was going to ask mamma to walk up with me to see you after tea, if we couldn't drive up. How would you like a companion?"

"You mean —?" Maizie hesitated, but Mrs. Porter looked up quickly.

"How extraordinary that you should ask that now, Nancy!" she exclaimed. "Nancy means a lady who would live with you and help you in just the ways you have been speaking of, in little niceties of speech and manners, teaching you customs of social intercourse, suggesting tasteful gowns, and going about with you, as you are too young to go about alone. You meant some one of that sort, didn't you, Nancy? And you must have heard of some one, but who can she be? I have racked my brains in vain to discover such a person."

"She is Miss Rhoda Drummond, the patient father went to see at North Chagford," explained Nancy. "She is young; I can't tell how old because she looks so sick and sad, but she's in the twenties, I think. She speaks prettily, and is refined, and she says she had a fine education, because her father was rich, but he hadn't any money at all when he died, and she has to earn her living. She came here to take a position, but something went wrong with it, and then she broke down. Father says she has nothing the matter with her, only worry, but he thinks she is quite ill of that. She is boarding over there at the Pailey farm and she can't stay longer because her money is all gone. I told her about the Coggs girls, and asked her if she would be their companion if they wanted her, and she was so glad — so weak, too — that she just burst out crying."

"If we want her! If we'll take her!" cried Taizie excitedly. "Well, what do you think of that, Maizie! Isn't that a regular cup-and-saucer fit! I guess we will take her! Send her up to the palace. If she doesn't like it she won't have to stay. It'll give her a chance to get well, anyhow, and goodness knows, there's room enough up there to stow away all the companions on earth. We're just rattling around in that house, though we've got two servants now, and Mr. Ri-Elijah's moved in with his wife, and she's the housekeeper. Poor girl! We're all sorry for people that have a hard time; we've had it. And, say, Nancy, we're having it now, only different. We came down to talk to your mother about it."

"Yes," chimed in Maizie, "we're not bats; we can see in daylight, and that party you had us to made us sit up and take notice. It was awful good of you, and the girls were all right, though we struck Mimi and Doris dumb; they couldn't do a thing but stare at us, as if we was freaks — and I guess we are pretty different! We see that ourselves. Little Cord thinks we're immense, but she doesn't count, being too little and kind of a pick-up herself, like us. And that Louise Willis is a duck, but Amy Bell — "

"Now, Maizie," interposed Taizie anxiously, fearing her sister would say too much, as Nancy flushed at the mention of this formidable name. "That Amy Bell's another sort. She's one of the kind that's deadly afraid of ketching things; she's afraid our colour will run, and she doesn't like the shade. She was kind of hateful — you mustn't mind, Nancy, 'cause we don't, honest, but that's the truth. But she showed us a thing or two."

"Oh, dear me," sighed Nancy, "I don't see what makes Amabel act so! I just knew you'd feel it. But you mustn't, much. She's always like that. She was dreadful when we first knew Rick, dreadful; it worried me nearly sick, but she got all over it."

"That's because she found out Rick was all right," said Maizie frankly. "Now, Nancy, we ain't all right. I don't mean there's anything wrong with us, because there ain't. We four Coggses mean to be about straight; we won't either of us twins do bad things, like lying, stealing, or mean sneakinesses if we know it, but we ain't all right, not the way you and Rick and these girls are. How could we be? Been knocking 'round all our days with poor folks, and didn't have any schooling, much, and our folks were just like that, till Peter Debbs got rich. But we ain't stupid; we could learn, give us half a chance. And what we come down to-day to see your mother for was to say we want to get that chance."

"Yes, sir," said Taizie, resuming her part in the duet, "that Amy Bell opened our eyes. Most likely we wouldn't of noticed ourselves so much if everybody had been nice to us, like your folks and Louise Willis, but that snubby thing made us sit up and take notice."

"She made us so mad we couldn't see straight," cried Maizie. "We was afraid you'd know how we felt, so we tried to cover up. But after we got home and talked it over, we kids decided that, though it was a poor way of giving lessons, when you had asked us all to your house for a party, still, we hadn't any real idea how to act in society, and Amy Bell was right in thinking so, if she wa'n't right any other way. And we made up our minds instead of spending any more money on clothes and diamonds, and things to put on us, we was going to spend some in things to put in us — in our brains. We came to ask your mother how to do it, and if she could tell us where to get 'em, besides here, where else we could go to see how folks acted that was used to behaving. And she told us to get a companion. That's why we thought it was so queer when you come along with one in your pocket."

"I have told these two sensible, honest girls how I admire them for taking this in the way they do, and how sure I am that girls as young as they are, who are so quick to see, will pick up what they need almost at once," said Mrs. Porter cordially. "Stupid girls would have been angry with Amabel and not half clever enough to get good out of her bad manners, which are, after all, at bottom worse than making mistakes. They are the worst of bad manners, the sort that come from unkindness. And I have said to them that I will take two of them, whichever two they prefer to send, down to Boston with us, with you and me, for a few days at Aunt Mary Lawrence's. You know, Nancy, Aunt Mary will gladly welcome them, if I write her that I am going to bring them, and that there they will see the most charming way of living and the finest sort of beautiful breeding. I told them that Aunt Mary could put us in the way of getting a desirable companion, but if you and your father have really found the right one in North Chagford that part is easily settled. This Miss Drummond — didn't you say? — would be welcome to the girls because she is sad and ill, and they would feel that they had a chance to do her good. I have learned that the Coggs twins love to make life easier for others! "

She smiled affectionately into the two flushed faces before her, really respecting and admiring, as she must, the sense and good temper these girls were showing in taking Amabel's snubbing as they did.

Maizie flew at Mrs. Porter and kissed her. " Well, you are certainly a peach! " she cried.

" Auntie Mary Lawrence will be at Swampscott by this time, won't she? " said Nancy.

" Not this year. Miles graduates from Technology, and Althea from Radcliffe, so she has stayed in town to be near them both," said Mrs. Porter. " I will write her to-day and, if she can receive us, you and I, with any two of the twins, will go for three or four days to Boston next week. Don't you like the idea? "

" Of course I do! " cried Nancy. " It's a beautiful idea, mamma mine, and I'm sure the twins will like it. Which two do you think will go? " she added to Taizie.

" We are scared to death at the idea of going to a grand and elegant place like that, but with you to see us through we'll live, I guess," said Taizie. " We all sort of count Maizie the head of the family; she'll go, for one. And by rights it ought to be Hazie with her, 'cause Hazie ain't quite so crazy as Daisy and me, though Hazie rhymes as good with crazy as any of the rest of our names! I shouldn't wonder much if I went; the other two kind of shove me ahead — or I go ahead — both, I guess."

" When we thought about getting all this money, first off," said Maizie pensively as she arose to make the first move toward going, " we didn't think of a thing but having fun. We planned to buy all there was and a little over, go 'round all the time, and not have one thing to bother us, not care for any one's talk, nor anything. We meant to sail right in and just whoop it up — if that ain't a unladylike word, and I guess it is! But, my gracious alive, we haven't been rich no time, and look at us! Coming right in line like lambs, wanting to get a missionary and stop being heathens! Ain’t it queer? Now we’ve got the money, instid of feeling we are awful independent, don’t care a mite, we feel as if we’d got to kinder make ourselves match it. I never’d of believed I’d of been so meeker’n Moses!”

Mrs. Porter laughed with all her heart. She arose with her guests and put an arm around Maizie, the meek, who really looked cast down by this amazing right-about face which she discovered in herself.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Porter, “that’s one of the good things about human beings. As a rule they will do their duty, if it is entrusted to them. People will be reckless and wild, careless, perhaps even wicked till responsibility falls on them, and then, in most cases, they will be sobered and do what is expected of them, carry their weight steadily. By and by, when you and Miss Drummond, if she comes to you, begin reading together, you will learn a phrase, *noblesse oblige,* which means that if any one is placed above his fellows it obliges him to be a good example and honourable. Great wealth obliges, as well as great birth. You are beginning to realize that you will have to do more in life, by and by, than amuse yourselves, isn’t that it?”

“I guess it is,” assented Maizie, still inclined to be pensive. " But it would be nice if we could just go as we please."

" Yes, but the funny thing is that go-as-you-please don't please us as much as it did," Taizie chimed in. " We're just as full of fun as we were, but — well, it ain't Amy Bell exactly, or her snubby ways, but we want to be so there ain't anything in us to snub. What we mean is we don't want that the money grandfather Peter Debbs settled on us is all there is to us."

" We perfectly understand and entirely sympathize with the feeling, Taizie," said Mrs. Porter. " But there is no danger of the money being all there is to like and respect in you. The best of a wish to improve is that the moment one wishes it that person is improved. There is a poem that says:

" 'Though his beginnings be but poor and low,
Thank God a man can grow!' "

" My, that sounds fine!" cried Maizie. " I guess we'll like reading all right, when we get at it. We haven't said thank you to Mrs. Porter, Taizie, but I declare if I know just how to say it strong enough! You're awful good to us, to talk to us, and let us tell you everything, and brace us up, and steer us right, the way you do. Then to say you'll take us down to that dandy Boston house! Nancy Porter, there ain't any girl has got a mother like yours. I guess if Peter Debbs's money makes us have to be kinder decent, your mother and the doctor makes you step high to keep up with 'em!"

"Oh, I know!" said Nancy. "I don't expect to keep up with them; I hope I'll keep just in sight of them, though!"

Her mother drew her close with the other arm, still holding Maizie with her left.

"Nancy must copy all her father's good traits and none of her mother's bad ones," she said.

Maizie bent down and kissed the little girl. "Don't you worry, Nancy Porter, about those bad traits. I don't know what traits means, but I guess it's ways. You're a dear kiddy, and we twins are sure of it," she said.

"How'll we know about that Miss Drummond?" asked Taizie.

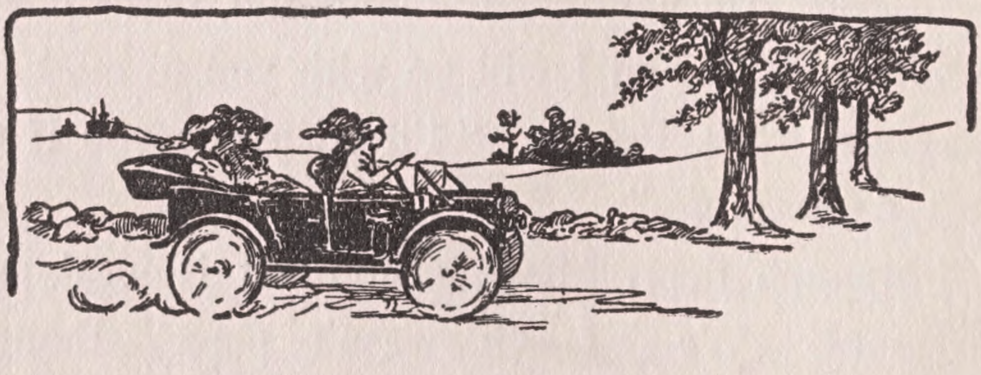
"Come with your car to-night, and, if the doctor is not busy, he and I will go with you to see her," suggested Mrs. Porter. "I'll telephone you if the doctor cannot go."

"Mamma dear, Miss Drummond is weak and worn-out. We — I — it wasn't papa — thought maybe she might come here for just a little visit, to rest and get well before she went to the big house?" said Nancy.

"Well, can't we rest her?" cried Taizie. "Oh, let her come right up to us, Mrs. Porter! We won't bother her till she's able, and it would be fun getting her round again."

Mrs. Porter smiled. "You shall have all the kindly fun of that sort we can give you," she said. "But don't you think we would better call on Miss Drummond before we settle these things? Come to-night, with the car, twin girls, and let us see if we can arrange with this stranger, who seems to have dropped down where she was needed and where she needed to be."

"All right; that's more sensible," said Maizie. "My, but things seem to be coming our way! Ain't this a warm elastic house, and ain't you warm elastic people, to take in the whole of us and everybody!"



CHAPTER X

PURPLE AND FINE LINEN

NANCY stayed at home with Letty Hetty while her mother drove with Maizie and Daisy Coggs to see Miss Drummond. The doctor had sent his patient a note advising her to fall in with the plan of taking her away from the farm-house that night, for that was the hope with which the impetuous twins had set out. They not only intended to ask Miss Drummond to come to them as their companion, but to persuade her to let them bear her off, then and there.

If they were successful in this mission there would not be room for Nancy in the car returning without crowding the invalid, so she stayed contentedly at home with Letty Hetty, but with permission to go to see Mimi, if she found time hang too heavily on her hands.

Rick and she swung in the hammock happily, enjoying the soft June evening, letting their heels scrape, not enough to harm the paint but just enough to make that lazy accompaniment to motion which adds to hammock enjoyment. Letty Hetty had come out to join them, her day's work done, the Chagford paper in her hand and her work-basket on the floor beside her. Although the twilight would not admit of her reading or working Letty Hetty was of that temperament that likes to have something to do always at hand. With this mute protest against laziness, she gave herself up to it, enjoying the hour of rest, rocking at a jogging pace and humming " Federal Street," ordinarily a plaintive hymn tune, but now rather peaceful than melancholy.

Rick and Nancy " chose " stars in fair alternation, and the early evening passed pleasantly till Nancy cried:

" I choose all the milky way, Rick! I see Cord coming, and we can't choose any more."

" Well, if that isn't a fine way to wind up! " Rick pretended to grumble. " Then I'll take the whole moon, though we left her out. If she's made of green cheese it ought to be all right to top off with! Cord's at the gate."

" I see her," Nancy said, getting out of the hammock, thus letting Rick slide down into the middle hollow. " Come in, Cordie. Rick and I were just sitting here."

" Lydia and Mercy said I might come down," said Cord, running up the steps. " Hallo, Rick. Hallo, Letty Hetty. What'd you s'pose? I churned to-day! "

" Alone? " cried Nancy.

Cord nodded with all her might. " Mercy's been showing me how for ever so long, and Lydia's been chipping in from the sofa, till, if I didn't know how, it wasn't because they hadn't told me. So to-day they let me try and I made the butter all myself! It was good, too; Lydia said so. Mercy wouldn't have counted so much, but Lydia said 'twas all right. So to-night they said, without my asking, I might come down to see you or Mimi. Let us go on down to Mimi's, Nancy. Where's your mother? "

" Gone to North Chagford, but she said I might go there if I wanted to. Shall we go, Rick? " asked Nancy. " Do you care, Letty Hetty? "

" Not a mite," said Letty Hetty. " Trot along, only don't stay long."

" Oh, not but a few minutes: there won't be time," said Nancy. " Come, then, Richie and Cord."

The three children went down the street, Cord leaning affectionately on Nancy. Mimi they found on the piazza of her home. The sprain was getting well fast: she could put her foot to the floor now, and in a week would use it freely.

Doris and Amabel were with her, and there was apparent an atmosphere of discomfort when the other three arrived that Nancy and Rick felt instantly and which Cord, with her usual out-spokenness, commented upon.

"What's up?" she asked. "What makes you so funny?"

Mimi looked flushed and excited, Doris glum, Amabel sullen, and they all had stopped talking when the new arrivals came in sight, although their voices, high-pitched, had reached their visitors considerably before they got to the house.

"We're not funny," said Mimi. "Come up and sit down, Nancy — and Cord and Rick."

"Nothing funny about us," said Doris, in a tone so disgusted that Nancy laughed and so did Rick, for this *was* funny.

"Well, Nancy, I may as well tell you," said Amabel. "You're the dearest thing in the world and we all think so. I'm never going to forget how dear you were to — how dear you are." Amabel altered her phrase, not caring to allude to a painful subject before so many. " But I think it's perfectly awful for you to take up with those common, common twins, just because they've got money — "

" Amabel, it isn't because of that! " cried Nancy shocked. " You don't think — "

" Oh, I don't mean you like them because they're rich; I know better than that," Amabel interrupted Nancy in turn. " But it's because they've got money they think they have to come around. Louise has tried to make me see how you feel, and she says your mother is lovely to try to help them. Louise says your mother is such a fine lady, so looked up to in town that anything she does is bound to go through. But I think it's dreadful to know people who are so — so dreadful! " Amabel found herself unequal to expressing herself. " They're just like servant girls — only worse."

" And I said they were kind and nice, and you'd show them how to be nicer," cried Mimi. " Look how good they were bringing me home that night! "

" And I'm poor, getting taken care of at Slocumses, working round and going to school! " cried Cord unexpectedly. There was a silence for a moment. Nobody had thought of Cord, and how this conversation might strike her.

"You don't count, Cordie," said Amabel kindly. "Mimi, Doris and Nancy sort of adopted you, and you are only a little girl, and you aren't shoving in. It's different, everyway."

"'Tain't," said Cord. "I don't care, if Nancy doesn't. What's the use?"

"Yes, what is the use?" asked Nancy slowly. "Things are puzzling, but mamma knows and so does papa, and they say never to make friends with horrid, coarse people, or wrong things, but when people are trying to do their best, not to be afraid of them. Mamma says be truly nice inside and it can't rub off, then you can risk helping people."

"And wasn't one of your grandfathers or somebody a signer?" asked Mimi triumphantly.

"Yes," said Nancy. "Sure enough! That makes us have to be true to the Declaration, doesn't it? It says everybody must have the same chance. Oh, I know you can't make friends with everybody, but when they are so kind, and want to be nice — Well," Nancy looked embarrassed, but persisted, though she had an American child's shyness about touching on religion. "Isn't it just the Golden Rule? We'd want people to be nice to us, if we were trying to learn something."

"That's it," said Rick decidedly.

"It's not the sort of people I want for friends," said Amabel.

"You've just been abroad, Amabel," cried Nancy, brightening. "Now, can't you imagine what it would be like if you had suddenly dropped down in Italy, didn't know a word of Italian, and people laughed at you and wouldn't have one thing to do with you, because you didn't know how to talk and behave? Would you like that?"

"That isn't the same," cried Amabel.

"Yes, it is! Yes, it is!" Mimi shouted. "Those Coggs girls don't know how to behave or talk like us, and the Porters are trying to teach them! It's just exactly the same."

"Yes," echoed Doris. "They're like foreigners, because they've lived so different."

"Well, anyway I don't care!" said Amabel, feeling that she was getting the worst of arguing and falling back on positive statements. "Louise talks like you, but I don't care. I don't want to know them, and I wish, Nancy Porter, when you're so perfectly dear, you wouldn't make it horrid by mixing things up so."

Nancy arose from the upper step where she had been sitting, with a laugh exactly like her father's.

"I'm not mixing them up, I'm sorting them out, straightening them — or it's really my mother that is," she said. "And mother is going to take two of the Coggs girls to Boston — I'm to go, too — to stay a few days with Aunt Mary Lawrence."

Amabel gasped. "At that swell, swell house, with those perfectly elegant people!" she cried. "Nancy!"

"It's true," said Nancy, nodding. "Aunt Mary won't change, so, if anything happens, it must be that it will do the girls good. At any rate they are going. And they are going to get a lovely young lady companion to live with them. Amabel, wouldn't it be comical if the Coggs twins learned so much and grew such fine ladies they were ashamed of knowing any of us two or three years from now? People who have lots of wealth sometimes get dreadfully toploftical! But no fear of those girls being silly; they're so kind and sensible! I must go home. Good night, girls. Glad you're better, Mimi dear. Don't worry, Amabel. I'll try not to ask you when the Coggs twins come to see us, but I don't see how you can help meeting them, because they'll be in Chagford a good while, I suppose."

"You're not mad with me, Nancy?" cried Amabel, running after her.

Nancy stopped to turn and laugh her happy little laugh. “Why, no; I don’t mind. You’ll get over it. You see you’re the only one to make a fuss about them. When we begin the pageant and the fair you’ll see how really nice they are.”

“Are they going to be in that?” cried Amabel, dismayed.

“Why, of course! Amabel, they wanted to buy a hospital, but papa said they couldn’t do more than work like the rest of the girls for it,” said Nancy with a quiet enjoyment of this final startling item in her news budget.

“Lydia said I should come home with Mr. Parsons; he’s down in town. He’s going to stop at your house and get me,” volunteered Cord, as they walked away, knowing that Nancy and Rick would try to arrange for her getting back. “Let’s race, will you? It’s cool enough now.”

Nancy and Rick accepted the proposal, and the difficulties of social problems were forgotten in the effort Nancy had to make to hold her own to a degree against Rick, or against little Cord, who ran like the wind, her slender body flying along till one was tempted to believe that her bones were hollow, like a bird’s.

They found Letty Hetty where they had left her;

she apologized for her unwonted idleness by saying that "a light in the house drew bugs."

The big car came along in a few moments and Nancy ran down to the gate to meet her mother, and learn the results of her mission.

"Miss Drummond is safely bestowed at the big house," said Mrs. Porter. "She did not seem overtired by the ride. She is an exceedingly attractive girl, Nancy, and I really believe this has been a providential arrangement for the girls and her."

Maizie Coggs leaned out of the car; she had come down with Mrs. Porter from her home to see her safely returned.

"It's the best thing I ever heard of!" she cried. "The girls up there are just crazy, they're so glad, and they're fussing over Miss Drummond like everything. They're so glad to get some one to take care of. We kinder thought, if we got rich, maybe we'd get a chance at doing something. You're awful nice to have thought of getting Miss Drummond for us, Nancy. We're lots obliged to you, you dear little thing, you! Cordie, that you? Get in and Mr. Elijah and I'll take you home."

Cord gladly obeyed, and the big car chugged and whirred away, with Maizie waving her hand from its rear and shouting something no one could possibly hear.

Four days later Mrs. Porter, Nancy, Maizie and Taizie Coggs stood on the platform of the Chagford station waiting for the Boston train.

The doctor held their tickets and talked nonsense, bidding Nancy beware of all sorts of impossible dangers when she arrived in the city.

" Maizie and Taizie must read all the books in the library before they come home," added the doctor. " And the only thing I implore of you for myself is that you will get me some Boston hulled corn, for there isn't any other like it, and few things on this old earth are as good for supper on a summer night."

" Mark, you absurd man! But I know you mean it, and we'll bring it, if we have to return with a tin pail worn on a chatelaine!" cried his wife. " There comes the train."

Of course all faithful students of the map of Massachusetts know that it does not take long to go from Chagford to Boston, not more than an hour and three quarters, or so. The ride did not seem long enough to the delighted girls, though Mrs. Porter was not desirous of prolonging it.

The party took a cab and drove through the streets that were crowded and congested around the station, into those which widened and grew more and more beautiful as they passed through Copley Square, past the glorious Library, the Museum and Trinity Church, green with its close vines, clinging to its stones, its solid beauty outlined with a half English, half Orient effect against the blue sky of June.

Mrs. Lawrence lived on that beautiful avenue that bears the name of the Commonwealth. Past its dignified houses, on the one hand, and its central chain of parks, on the other, they drove till, at last, they stopped before one of the most dignified of the mansions, and ascended the steps.

The door was opened by a maid who smiled a welcome to Mrs. Porter that showed her remembrance of the guest, as she held the door open for the girls to follow that lady.

"Miss Nancy, it is good to see you again," said the maid softly as Nancy passed her.

"Thank you, Rose; it is good to come," replied Nancy, and somehow, they could not explain why, Maizie and Taizie felt awed and quiet.

A man-servant appeared from the depths of the hall and took Mrs. Porter's travelling cases from the cab driver, and carried them away. Maizie and

Taizie were relieved to find them again in their room when they were taken to it by another maid, to whom the first one consigned the duty of showing it to them.

The stairs of the house were broad and low; the Coggs girls had never seen a staircase like this one, and, though they knew nothing of architecture, they felt its beauty. A suite of rooms, a sitting-room and two bed-rooms, with large dressing-rooms and a bath-room, had been assigned the guests. Maizie and Taizie gasped as they wandered farther into their marvels.

"Oh, say, Taize, we can't be dreaming, because we wouldn't know how to dream it, but did you ever in all your born days!" demanded Maizie.

"No, sir, never!" replied Taizie emphatically, as she cautiously handled the toilet silver on the dressing-table and lightly touched its embroidered cover.

Still another maid appeared and offered to help Mrs. Porter in laying out the clothing the guests had brought.

"There is so little, Annie, it doesn't matter," smiled Mrs. Porter, thanking her. "We are not going to stay long, and have brought no unnecessary thing."

"Ah, well, madam, all that Mrs. Lawrence and Miss Lawrence ever ask is that you will bring Miss Nancy and come yourself, and we servants share her feeling," said Annie.

"Taizie, did you hear that girl's voice and what she said?" whispered Maizie in the next room. "We couldn't talk like that!"

"Oh, my, no!" Taizie returned, as emphatically as if she were not also whispering.

"Miss Drummond'll have to work over time to get us fit to be rich; I see that already."

In a short time there came a tap at the door which Nancy sprang to open. Instantly she was in the embrace of a lady, tall and slender, graceful, elegant in every tone and gesture. Her soft silken gown fell in long, simple lines of silvery sheen around her, soft yellowish lace dropped over her white hands, and the separate twins noticed that on them was not a jewel except one fine diamond, surmounting a wedding ring.

"My dear little Nancy!" said this lady, kissing the little girl with much affection. "You don't know how glad your Aunt Mary is to see you, child! And Mildred, my dear!"

The pleasure that these two life-long friends felt in meeting was unmistakable.

"Mary, here are the guests whom I have brought you. Mrs. Lawrence, this is Miss Mary Coggs, this is Miss Teresa Coggs. My dears, this is our dear hostess, Mrs. Lawrence."

"I am glad to know you, Miss Coggs, Miss Teresa," said Mrs. Lawrence. "We must try to make this a pleasant visit."

"Thank you, ma'am; hope you're well," murmured the twins together, painfully embarrassed.

Seeing their misery Mrs. Lawrence turned again to her older friend, and presently bore her away, leaving Nancy to explain, as well as she could, the many puzzles that the two explorers of this higher altitude of life laid before her.

Dinner that night seemed to Maizie and Taizie awful beyond their fears, yet beautiful. They were divided between terror of doing the wrong thing, and a noble ambition sometime to be able to invite guests to a like dinner in their own house.

Mr. Lawrence and the only son, Miles, were at home, but Mrs. Lawrence's daughter was in college; there were no other guests, nor was it a formal dinner, but Maizie and Taizie found it terrifying. There was such perfect, noiseless serving, so many dishes offered to them by the deft manservant, and so many that they had no previous acquaintance with, that the poor girls could hardly eat. They watched Nancy, who appeared just as she did at home, simple and contented, frankly admiring the splendour around her, but not in the least awe-struck nor ill-at-ease.

Maizie and Taizie were grateful to Nancy for the signals she managed to convey to them for their guidance, and followed her every motion so faithfully that their hostess and Mrs. Porter exchanged glances of amusement when they could safely do so. After dinner Mr. Lawrence and his son disappeared and Mrs. Lawrence entertained the younger guests so pleasantly with music, games, tricks and stories, while Mrs. Porter sat quietly enjoying her friend's cleverness, that Maizie and Taizie began to feel at home with her, and unconsciously entertained her in their turn with funny speeches and ways all their own.

"It must be early to bed, Mary dear, for my lassie, and I think perhaps for Maizie and Taizie — what do you say, girls?" said Mrs. Porter at last. "We shall have a busy day to-morrow, and it will be warm."

"Sure," said Taizie promptly. "We'll do whatever you want us to, go to bed or sit up."

"Then bid Mrs. Lawrence good night, please.

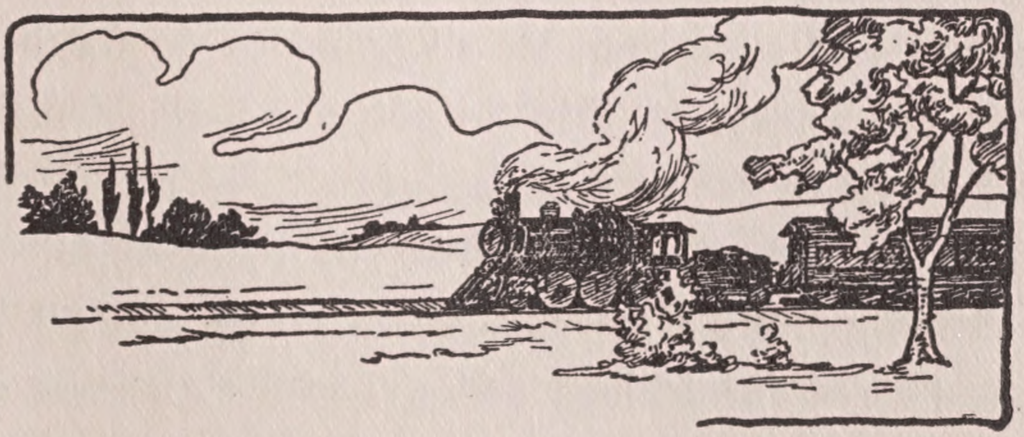
Say good night to Aunt Mary, Nancy. She has given us a delightful evening," hinted Mrs. Porter.

"Good night, Auntie. Thank you," said Nancy, presenting her cheek to Mrs. Lawrence.

The twins copied her quite successfully, and Mrs. Porter marshalled her flock to bed. Upstairs the twins once more had difficulty because a maid waited to help them undress. They stole away to say good night to Mrs. Porter in her room.

"It's the biggest thing we ever saw," Maizie said, and Mrs. Porter knew that she meant the whole beautiful ceremonious manner of life around her. "Will we ever be able to be anything like it?"

"If you really try. I wanted you to see what it means to have great wealth, and that it is worth while learning to use it beautifully," Mrs. Porter answered.



CHAPTER XI

COMING EVENTS

MRS. PORTER stayed with the three girls but two days in Boston. Mrs. Lawrence was more than occupied with the great business of her son's and daughter's coming graduation, the weather was intensely warm, without that life-giving east wind that makes summer in Boston bearable. The twins were becoming oppressed by the restraint of the formality of existence in Commonwealth Avenue, much as they admired it; Nancy was always impatient to get back to her father, her friends, her pets, her home. Mrs. Porter had some summer shopping to do for herself and Nancy, but this did not take long. On the afternoon of the second day after their arrival the Chagford party said good-by to their kind and charming hostess, her delightful house and all its beauties of furnishings and graceful stateliness of customs, and took train to return to the pretty old town that waited them with the warm welcome of a glowing June sunset behind its hills.

Doctor Porter was ready for his wife and little girl with Tonic in the surrey. The Coggs automobile, with the home-staying twins and Elijah, were all eagerly hailing the missing Coggs as they came off the train.

Daisy and Hazie tumbled out of the tonneau and noisily, but affectionately, bade their sisters welcome.

"How was it? Got a lot of points how to be perfect ladies?" cried they. "Had a fine time? My, hasn't it been hot, though! Miss Drummond is a duck, teaches us lots of things all the time, so it doesn't hurt, and she's better already! Mrs. Porter, you certainly are good to us and we all hope there'll be something we can do for you and Nancy, some day."

"Come, come, children!" protested Doctor Porter. "You can't say it all, nor hear it all on the station platform! Get into your triumphal car, Ladies of the Lake, and let me drive my prodigal daughter home in my old-fashioned, but better turn-out."

The double twins laughed and obeyed. The car whizzed off, and above its jar the quartette of shrill, laughing, chattering voices floated back to the Porters, soberly starting homeward in the surrey.

"There is a great to-do in Chagford, also," said the doctor, having listened to Nancy's eager story of the most striking events of her brief absence. "The programmes for the affair in aid of the hospital are under discussion. Miss Belinda Allaire is most wrought up over it, full of enthusiasm and full of ideas. She has chosen Louise Willis for her lieutenant, at least for the young people's branch of the affair. There is to be a meeting to-morrow of girls of various sizes up at the Allaire house — they want my assistant to come to it."

"She will! What fun!" cried Nancy. "What are they going to have?"

"Not a fair after all," said the doctor, "although if any one makes or donates anything salable there will be a sale booth provided. But a pageant of Chagford's history for her citizens of all ages, and something special for the young people, seems to be the prevailing idea now."

"I wonder what the children's would be?" said Nancy thoughtfully, but Tonic stopped at the Porter gate as she wondered, and she forgot all about the coming event in the other sort of wonder of getting home again. For even three days of absence are enough to make the return to a happy home wonderful, with a sense of marvel that nothing has changed.

Letty Hetty stood beaming on the upper step, Rick came bounding down the walk, the door was open and Bumblebee looked out with dilated eyes — Bumblebee was one of those nervous cats whom no amount of petting from infancy is enough to convince of the trustworthiness of humanity — and Fred came rushing down after Rick, wagging his entire body and yelping little staccato yelps of rapture. Oh, it was good to come home! Nancy knew that no other place would ever look to her as beautiful as this.

"Well, I've been wonderin' how you two stood the heat in the city!" said Letty Hetty by way of greeting. "It was hotter here last night than I've ever known it, or so it seemed, but a thunder shower kind o' cooled it, toward dawn. Land sakes, Nancy, Rick and I and the live stock — maybe the doctor, too! — found it lonesome enough without you! How'd the Coggs children take to the fleshpots of Egypt, when they were covered with the right sort o' crust? I'd give something to have seen those two at the Lawrences'!"

"They got on very well, Letty Hetty," said Mrs. Porter. "They were quiet, and saw all that there was to see. I look for results from the visit, brief though it was. Mrs. Lawrence liked them just as we do, thought they were good material."

"Oh, well, anybody like Mrs. Lawrence would know how to make allowance, and see the real qualities those girls have," said Letty Hetty. "Grandma Emerson's sort of poorly; had a little sick spell — heat, the doctor says. But she's mis'rable, for her."

"Oh, dear, she should not live alone!" sighed Mrs. Porter. "If only any one could make the dear little soul see it, or yield the point without seeing it! But those sweet little old ladies are what used to be called 'set in their ways'!"

"As set as fate," agreed Letty Hetty. "And there's a young woman, quite young, who came over yest'day from the Falls, wants to get dressmaking, or sewing to do by the day, goin' out. She's comin' again to see you, Mrs. Porter; I told her I didn't know."

"Neither do I!" sighed Mrs. Porter, with a laugh. "But we'll see."

"Supper's just about ready," said Letty Hetty, preceding the others into the house. "I'll hold it back, if you want I should; it's too warm to eat in travellin' things."

The next morning early Nancy was sent down to inquire for Grandma Emerson, as her mother could not go, and to take to her the little remembrances that Mrs. Porter and Nancy had brought to her from Boston. Like most people, the dear little old lady liked to know that she was remembered, caring more for that than for the form the remembrance took — though she delighted in candy like a girl in her 'teens.

She saw Nancy coming and came out to meet her, after her established custom. Rick had walked with Nancy so far, and paused a moment to hear Grandma Emerson's report of herself before going on to school.

"And this is the young lady from Boston!" she said. "Let me look at her and see if she is improved by travel. I do believe she is! I am well, Master Richard, and you are not to credit libels that impute ill health to me," she added. "Run along to school, laddie, and take with you the certainty that the little old lady called Grandma Emerson, is flourishing like a green bay tree. Nancy, you are to come into the house and tell me all that has happened to you in the long time you were gone! Truth to tell, little girl, it did seem like a long time, although it was not nearly as long as I have lived."

Rick smiled and went on as he was bidden, but he saw that the little woman was pale, looked weak, and it seemed to both the children that she was forcing her usual sprightliness.

Nancy recounted her adventures from the beginning to the end, making Grandma Emerson laugh over the droll things that Maizie and Taizie did, and pleasing her by telling her what they had said that showed they were beginning to see things in truer colours and proportions. Grandma Emerson wanted to know precisely how Mrs. Lawrence had looked, what she had said of Althea, whom Nancy had not seen, and of her coming graduation; how Miles looked, and what changes there had been in the large department stores since Nancy's last report. Though Grandma Emerson cheerfully said that she should never again go to Boston, she wanted every minute detail of the city told her by its latest visitor, by this means keeping in touch with its changes.

Nancy arose to go at last, having emptied her budget. She gave Grandma Emerson two small

"NANCY RECOUNTED HER ADVENTURES FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE END."

packages and a good-sized box, wrapped in the telltale white paper which most people like to see coming into the house.

"The kinds you like best, Grandma!" laughed Nancy. "And a double layer of peppermint creams at the bottom!"

Nancy hopped and skipped all the way home. Her errand done, she turned her thoughts to the next event of the day — the meeting of that afternoon.

Her father drove her up to the Allaire house, slowly, for he had much still to say and hear, having been deprived of Nancy nearly three days. Besides, the afternoon was intensely warm, close and still, with the threat of another needed thunder shower in the air. Tonic might well be spared undue exertion.

Nancy found the Allaire house as cool inside as the great Stone House always was. She went straight to the drawing-room where were already gathered all of her friends, and many acquaintances who could not claim the closer name.

The panelled paper, representing a tiger hunt, which had so oppressed Nancy two years before, was gone. In its stead the walls were covered with a beautiful, heavy gold paper, a dull gold, with greenish lights over it from certain directions, that accorded well with the massive old-fashioned furniture, which had served three or four generations of Allaires.

Miss Dorinda and Miss Belinda Allaire were there, Miss Dorinda sitting in her usual dignity, a little apart at the end of the room. But Miss Belinda, looking years younger for the animation of her face and air, sat in the midst of the girls, with Louise at her side; each held a pad of writing paper and a pencil, and both looked up to smile a welcome to Nancy, whom Miss Belinda by a gesture invited to a vacant chair at her side.

Nancy accepted the chair and took off her hat. "If you don't mind?" she said, dropping it on her knees and fanning herself with her handkerchief, for she was warm.

"You are later than the others, Nancy, so you have not heard the discussion," said Miss Belinda. "It is decided that we are to have a pageant, in which old and young will take part, but we are to have something pretty, given by the children alone — by 'children' we mean people under twenty — young people would be more correct. But what this is to be we cannot think. So far nothing has been proposed as good as a woodland dance, a costume dance out of doors, or series of tableaux — but my objection to that is that it would be so much like the pageant, which is a series of tableaux, also. Can you suggest something? Louise has been inspired by her recent trip to suggest that the tableaux might be mediæval Florentine subjects. That would be pretty, if it is to be tableaux at all."

"Put on your thinking cap, Nancy," added Louise. "I'm ready to note a suggestion."

Nancy glanced at the pad in Louise's hand and saw that there had been many suggestions already made and noted by her, which had been crossed off as undesirable.

"I don't know," said Nancy hesitatingly, rather abashed by being called upon "to speak in meeting." "It isn't easy to think of anything right off, you know."

"Don't we know!" cried Louise. "It isn't easy to think of anything new, anyway."

"Rick will be here soon, right after school; Rick may know something. He's good at anything that's at all like making believe," said Nancy.

"So are you!" cried Amabel Willis from her seat on the other side of the room. "Rick's no better at making believe than you are."

"Not one bit," agreed Doris and Mimi together. "But this isn't the same, is it?"

"It's a good deal like it," sighed Nancy. "Only when you are playing something make believe it is because it comes right into your head to do it; you don't have to get a rake and a spade to dig for it — and you feel like it, besides."

Every one laughed, but Nancy was serious. "If I had known we were to suggest things I'd have been thinking last night after I went to bed, or I'd have got papa to help me, coming up here; that would have been best. I don't know one thing!"

Nancy fanned herself harder and sighed, wiping her moist brow with the handkerchief fan. She turned her eyes to the window, feeling most uncomfortable with the twofold heat of a warm day and embarrassment, and the sense of being wholly without an idea. As she glanced toward the window the blue of the lake caught her eye, barely discernible through the trees. It looked so cool and refreshing that Nancy's eyes dwelt upon it longingly; she wished that she were sitting under its bordering trees, where there was always a breeze, and where the light lapping of the water against its stones was cooler than a wind. As she looked, an idea struck her that made her cry: "Oh!" aloud, straightening herself and forgetting all about heat, discomfort and the lake as she turned a beaming face toward Miss Belinda.

"You look like a small feminine Christopher Columbus, Nancy!" cried Miss Belinda. "What have you thought of?"

"It is like Christopher Columbus!" laughed Nancy, too interested in her idea to be shy in explaining it. "It's like him, because it is a plan for sailing. Could we have an evening celebration on the lake? Could we hang Japanese lanterns all along the banks of the lake, and trim boats like gondolas, and have the children dressed like fairies and all sorts of lovely things? And have music on the water, and let the boats float all around, then let them make figures together, and let them end with a procession — would that be any good?"

Nancy was rather frightened as she ended, for she was not sure that it would be as pretty as it had seemed to her when she first saw the picture in her imagination, as she looked out the window toward the lake.

But Miss Belinda and Louise had no doubt. Miss Belinda sprang to her feet girlishly. "Isn't it splendid, everybody?" she cried. "No one has suggested anything half as pretty! We could have the pageant the following day, after the water spectacle — of course the pageant would be given in daylight. Shall we vote on accepting Nancy Porter's suggestion? Can any one add to it, or make objection to it, either one? No? Then all in favour of making the young people's part of the entertainment this water fête — what shall we call your lake fête, Nancy?" Miss Belinda interrupted herself to ask.

"The Water Babies," said Rick's voice from somewhere, and everybody laughed.

"Oh, Rick, when did you come?" cried Nancy, leaning forward to look for him. "I wanted you to suggest something."

"I've been here a little while," said Rick, half rising from a low stool beside the door. "Couldn't have beaten your idea, Nancy; it's great."

"Then shall we vote on it?" Miss Belinda resumed. "All in favour of adopting this suggestion of Nancy Porter's please say: Aye!"

There was a shout of: "Aye!" in full chorus all over the room, and when Miss Belinda called for a contrary vote not a voice responded.

"Unanimously carried, little Nancy!" said Miss Dorinda Allaire, from her dignified aloofness.

" Now I should like to suggest that we have a King and Queen of this water revel — " began Louise.

" The very name for it, Louise! " cried Miss Belinda delightedly. " I beg your pardon! You were going to say a King and Queen of the Water Revel? "

" Yes, Miss Belinda," Louise went on. " Let the prettiest girl be chosen and the handsomest boy. The girl must wear white that night, with a long thin gauzy veil and a glittering crown, and the boy — well, I don't know precisely what the King should wear, but something silvery, and showy by electric and other artificial lights! And we will fit out a royal barge for this pair, and they shall lead the revel, and give commands for all the other boats to follow. Don't you think that would be effective? "

" Beautiful! " cried Miss Belinda, actually clapping her hands like a girl, and everybody took the cue from her and applauded Louise's suggestion.

" Let us nominate the prettiest girls now, while we are all here together," said Miss Belinda. " It is well to get as many details settled as possible."

" How shall we nominate? " asked Louise.

" By calling out names," said a tall girl from

North Chagford. "Let any one who thinks a girl would be suited to that part propose her aloud."

Unexpectedly Maizie Coggs rose up in the meeting, her rosy face deep red from embarrassment, yet entirely self-possessed. "Ladies and gentlemen," she said. "I don't want to put myself forward, but I just want to ask a question. Seems to me you could save some of that bother; it would take a good while to sift those girls down to one. If we was — were — voting for the girl everybody in these three towns loves best, I guess we wouldn't have to vote at all. I guess Doctor Porter's little girl is the one Chagford, and North Chagford, and Chagford Falls knows best and loves best. And I guess people like Louise Willis and think she's pretty, but if there ain't — isn't — one downright prettiest girl in these towns, and right in this room, then I'm blind. I'd like to know, honest, if every one here doesn't think Amy — Amabel Willis is the prettiest girl here? We Coggses think so, and I guess there can't be two minds about it. So, if we do think so, why not vote same's we did before. I nominate Amy Bell — Amabel Willis."

Maizie sat down in the midst of a surprised silence. She had demanded a good deal in asking all the other girls to admit that Amabel was the prettiest girl in the three Chagfords — yet, wasn't it true?

The meeting was obliged to acknowledge that it was. While there were many pretty girls, Amabel Willis was a beauty, supremely handsome, even at fourteen.

"Maizie has been learning how to speak, from Miss Drummond," whispered Doris to Nancy, but Nancy did not hear her.

She was watching Amabel, whose face was a study. She was crimson, overwhelmed, less by being publicly proclaimed the prettiest girl in the three towns, for Amabel was not easily embarrassed, than by the fact that Maizie Coggs, Maizie, one of the twins whom she scorned and had snubbed, had been the one thus to proclaim her!

"It's pretty good of Maizie," murmured Mimi in Nancy's other ear.

"That's just like her; she isn't mean," said Nancy. "And she's honest. She doesn't care about Amabel, but she thinks she is the prettiest girl — so she is! — and she just says so. But of course it's fine of her; there aren't many girls who would do that."

In the meantime the meeting was voting, and by another unanimous vote had elected Amabel Queen of the Water Revel, the prettiest girl of them all!

"Now," said Miss Belinda, rising, "I should like to nominate the King of the Water Revel. I propose Richard Lovering; does it please the meeting?"

"Yes!" shouted a chorus, for Rick's beauty was as perfect as if Praxiteles had carved it in marble.

After this the meeting broke up; there was no more business to be done that afternoon.

"Isn't it exciting?" said Nancy, taking Rick by the coat sleeve to be escorted home.

"Don't touch me, maiden," commanded Rick haughtily. "I am the King!"

"Well, if a cat may look upon a king, a doctor's assistant may certainly hold on to his coat sleeve," laughed Nancy.

CHAPTER XII

AN (AB)ORIGINAL PLAN

NANCY sat on the upper step, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands, her mind in the dumps. It was entirely unlike Nancy to be glum; although she was not a romping child, but inclined to be quiet, as was natural to an only child growing up among older people, she was happy all the day long. "Sunny and even-dispositioned," Letty Hetty correctly described Nancy as being, so it was strange to see her moping on the upper step, declining even the consolation of the piazza chairs or the hammock.

Mimi and Doris came along and found her so; she did not alter her position when she saw them, but feebly waved one of the hands that held her chin.

"Hallo, Nancy; what're you doing?" called Mimi, as she and Doris turned in at the gate.

"Nothing," replied Nancy. "Thinking."

"What're you thinking about?" inquired Doris, immediately adding: "I wouldn't think about it, whatever it is; you look fearfully solemn."

"I feel solemn," said Nancy. "Who wouldn't, if she had to be that Indian?"

"What Indian? Oh, you mean Takatelka! I wonder if that was her real name, anyway! Pocahontas sounds real, but Takatelka — well, I don't know how Indian names ought to sound." Mimi ended her criticism abruptly, realizing her incompetence for it.

"Her name ought to be Pocy-something; I'm sure she's pokey enough!" said Nancy with a reluctant little laugh. "Yes, I do mean Takatelka! I feel as though I could not do it; I'd like to be out of the pageant, if I have to be that squaw girl! But I don't see how I can refuse when Miss Belinda asks me to take that part — she's so perfectly lovely to me, teaching me music, because there's no one else here can do it so well, and doing everything she can for me, all the time! I couldn't say no to her. Then, of course, in one way I want to do it, that is, I love Miss Belinda so much I love to please her, but in every other way I just hate to do it."

"What makes you hate it, Nancy?" asked Doris. "It's a nice part, I think."

"Well, I wish you had it! You could make up for it, too, with your straight black hair," Nancy surveyed Doris critically as she spoke. "Miss Belinda told me if I had curly hair she couldn't have given it to me — I always did wish my hair curled!"

Mimi and Doris dropped down beside Nancy. "I don't see anything bad about it," said Mimi.

"To have your skin coloured bronze, and wear the Indian costume, and come out in leggings and feathers, giving those early settlers the distilled herbs that cured them! Well, I'm nearly sure I shall not be able to walk out; my knees will be stiff with fright, and I'll shake so my feather headdress will look just like a duster getting shaken out of the window on sweeping day!" cried Nancy energetically.

Mimi and Doris shouted. "Oh, Nancy, you do say such ridiculous things!" cried Mimi.

"You're so good at making believe I should think you could do Takatelka splendidly. Can't you play you really are her? Then you'd be all right; that's the way you and Rick play your funny old knights and ladies things."

"Oh, yes, but knights and ladies are different. I'm interested in those things, and I'd love to be a chatelaine of the Middle Ages! I wouldn't be one bit shy, because I'd be living right in the romance of it," cried romantic Nancy.

" A chatelaine! You a chatelaine! What in the world do you mean? Do you mean wear a chatelaine — you couldn't be one!" cried Doris, puzzled.

" Mercy me, Doris, I do believe you think I mean a chatelaine chain!" cried Nancy. " A chatelaine was the mistress of a castle."

" But only think what Takatelka did for Chagford!" remonstrated Mimi, sticking to the point with characteristic perseverance. " If, when those few early settlers came here from the Massachusetts Bay Colony and got so dreadfully sick, Takatelka hadn't left her own people and brought them those wonderful distilled herbs the Indians knew about and used, which cured the white men, there wouldn't have been any settlers and there wouldn't have been any Chagford. It's a great honour to take that part."

" Miss Belinda thought so, I know that, and I'm not saying a word against Takatelka, so you needn't take her part — I mean you needn't defend her; I only wish you could take her part!" Nancy laughed again, and felt better for her own mild joke.

" Anyway, I'm going to be that friendly Indian maiden in the pageant, and I'm a goose to sit here hating it. Let's go up and see how the dolls are," proposed Nancy, rising.

The three trooped into the attic where Rosamond, Dorothy and Leonora had maintained their calm pose since that May day when they had been definitely relinquished by their young mothers.

"It's a good thing they aren't wax dolls!" exclaimed Doris, gasping, for the afternoon sun of early July made the attic suffocatingly warm.

"Would it be breaking our word to take them down-stairs to look at them? Isn't it just the same as looking at them up here, only not so uncomfortable?" asked Mimi.

Nancy shook her head decidedly. "I'd rather say right out: 'Now I'm going to break my word and that's all there is about it,' than I would to pretend I was keeping it, and try to make myself believe I was keeping it by crawling around with excuses, when all the time I wasn't really keeping it, and down in my heart I knew I wasn't."

"That's like a girl in school — you know her, Nancy; Annie Debney," said Doris. "That's the way she is about telling a story. She says she'll never tell a story, but she twists things to make what she says true, yet not any farther true than the words of it. Like this: The other day the teacher asked her if she was chewing gum in school. And Annie had been chewing like everything, all the morning, but she whisked her gum out of her mouth and stuck it inside the lid of her desk, and said, 'No, she wasn't chewing.' Well, of course she wasn't, not that minute, but Miss Chapman didn't mean that minute; she meant was she chewing at all. Annie stuck to it that wasn't a lie, because she took the gum out, so it should be true, but Mimi and I, and some of the others, said it was one. Don't you think it was?"

"I think it's worse than a lie," said Nancy decidedly, "because it's mean. It is a lie, of course it is: it wasn't a true answer to that question, not to what she knew Miss Chapman meant, and it's worse, I think, because the words she said were sort of true. It's like taking poor Truth by the hair of her head and making her bow to Lie, and then making her let him wear her clothes, so people will think he's she!"

"Nancy, how queer you are!" cried Mimi, but she meant clever when she said queer.

"Well, I don't admire lying," said Nancy, "but I perfectly hate sneaking around with just true words and no truth underneath them. Girls, it's too hot to stay up here talking about lying! The dolls are all right. I wish we could take them down-stairs! But we can't; we gave them up — up attic!" Nancy laughed her little inward laugh, by this time perfectly cheerful. "If I took back Rosamond I'd be an Indian giver, as well as an Indian girl in the pageant."

"I don't believe 'king, king, give a thing and never take it back again' matters so much when you've only given it to an attic," said Mimi. "But let's cover them up again and come on down. I don't really see what we came up for; we aren't doing anything, and it's just sizzling up here."

"Then that's what we're doing — sizzling!" cried Nancy. But she led the way down the narrow stairs again, and at the foot of the second flight, on their way back to the cool piazza, the girls met Rick.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Nothing but the three dolls; we were up, but we're down now," said Nancy.

Rick looked at her with a laugh in his eyes, but with his lips puckered, suggestively whistling softly: "Smarty, smarty, smarty!"

"I don't know what's the matter with me, Richie; I don't want to do a single thing, and yet I hate to do nothing," Nancy said, after acknowledging the implied comment with a deep bow. "I hardly ever feel so — so like Bumblebee when her fur's rubbed the wrong way! I've been dismal because I had to be Takatelka, and generally horrid."

"That doesn't sound like you. I don't see one thing the matter with being Takatelka; just you wait till the time comes to rehearse and you'll begin to like her," advised Rick. "I'll tell you! I've been thinking about it all day. Do you suppose your mother and the doctor would let us spend the night out of doors? Mimi and Doris stay, and you three sleep in the tent — we could put it up out under the trees somewhere — and I would patrol all night! Wouldn't it be great? And it wouldn't hurt me; school is over and I could take a long nap to-morrow. We would play you were three Indian maidens, Takatelka and two others — we'd make up their names — and you had left your tribe because they had driven you out for being kind to the palefaces. And I'd be a splendid, brave young settler who was guarding the maidens for fear their own people would come in the night to murder them for having run away to the palefaces for protection. Oh, Nancy, really, wouldn't it be a dandy play?"

Nancy looked stirred, her eyes dilated, her colour came, she fairly panted to begin this delightful make-believe at once.

" If only they will let us ! " she cried. " But I'm pretty nearly sure they will ; they always let us do anything nice, and we never did anything half as nice as this ! You'll come, Mimi and Doris, won't you — if we do it ? "

" Yes," answered Mimi at once, but Doris hesitated. " Of course I will, if I can, but Aunt Augusta will never in this world let me sleep out of doors, if she knows about it before."

" I'll get papa to stop and tell her we are going to do it when he goes out this evening. She'll never dare say a word against it then ; she'll think he has ordered us to sleep out of doors for our health. You know your aunt never asks any questions about anything papa wants done," said Nancy, realizing, as did Doris, from past experience, how useful was the doctor and his wife's influence in winning favours for the little girl, brought up with trying strictness.

" He's coming home now," announced Rick. seeing Tonic approaching. " The first thing to do is to find out if the doctor will say yes, himself."

"'Tenting to-night,' eh?" asked the doctor pulling Nancy's hair and laying a hand on Rick's shoulder. "And all to make the part of Takatelka vivid to Nancy?"

"No, sir; mostly for fun," said Rick.

"Truth is mighty and must prevail!" laughed the doctor. "Well, then this case shall follow the rule! You shall have the tent and sleep under the stars — but I'm afraid you won't sleep much!"

"No, but we can take naps!" cried Nancy, jumping up and down gleefully. "You are such a dear doctor-daddy to see right away how nice it would be! Run home and ask if you may stay all night with me, Mimi and Doris. And, listen! Wouldn't it be nice to ask Cord to come too? She'd love it so. She could run home early in the morning; we're sure to wake up."

"No doubt of that," agreed her father. "I'll go tell Stephen to put up the tent, with my help — Rick might lend a hand — and then I'll go to convince your mother that you won't be carried off by crickets if you use it."

"And will you please stop to see Miss Clark tonight and convince her, too?" asked Nancy. "She may not let Doris come if she knows about sleeping out, so Doris is just going to ask to stay all night, and leave it for you to tell her that we shall sleep in the tent."

"How many times you monkeys make me a cat's paw to pull your chestnuts out of the fire!" the doctor growled, but he nodded at Doris that he would obtain the pleasure for her, having a constant desire to see every child in the world happy, every moment of life.

The girls came running back, with Cord in their company, something over an hour later, to find the tent in its place. The spot chosen for it was sheltered from the road by screening trees, yet open on the other side to the much needed breeze, for the night promised to be as warm as the day.

Mrs. Porter and Letty Hetty had begun furnishing it, after Stephen and Rick had laid down the fragrant pine boughs and straw which were to be the bedsteads. On these Nancy's mother and Letty Hetty spread blankets, more than the little girls would need, but, like all good mothers, Mrs. Porter expected it to turn cold in the night, expressly to harm her ewe lamb.

Supper was an excited meal, but Nancy had another happy thought.

"May we take something to eat into the tent, mamma?" she asked. "If we should happen to lie awake we might get hungry."

"Yes, indeed; I had been planning to pack a basket for you and one for Rick's bivouac. I'm sure that he would rather have his own rations, like any sentry," said Mrs. Porter.

"And so did I think of that," Letty Hetty chimed in. "I've already begun puttin' a few little things together in a basket, cold chicken, some lettuce sandwiches, cookies, a pie — some things like that."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Mimi and Doris together, while Nancy laughed and hugged Letty Hetty.

"Makes me hungry straight off," declared Cord, "right after supper. I guess we'll stay awake on purpose."

"I had to lose my hour to-night, mamma," said Nancy, as they all went out on the piazza to wait till the sunset had entirely faded before taking possession of the tent. "To-morrow I must have an extra hour at noon — 'a noon spell,' as the farmers say."

"All the hours you wish, little daughter," said Nancy's mother. "If this heat holds we will take our book and go off into the woods for more than an hour; it is all these days are fit for."

Nancy perched on the arm of her father's chair, leaned her cheek over on the top of his head and watched the sunset burn and brighten, fade to pinks and violets, flame again into pure, pulsating gold of the afterglow and then die away into the tinted, diminishing grays of twilight and the colourless purity of night and the starshine. Mimi and Cord had been fidgeting through this delay in starting on their adventure. Rick's politeness and Doris' training in self-repression had been severely strained, but now, at last, Nancy turned and gave her father his good-night kiss, saying: "Well, we can go now!"

Mrs. Porter had provided light woollen jackets and wrappers, one for each little girl to sleep in — or to lie awake in, which seemed more likely.

"Oh, Mrs. Porter, when it's so awful hot!" protested Cord.

"Two and three o'clock in the morning are different from nine at night, Cordie. You are not used to sleeping out. Please put this on to oblige me, then," Mrs. Porter plead, and Cord said no more; all the children would do anything at any time that either the doctor or his wife asked of them, because these two were always their sworn allies and lovers.

"Good night, Aborigines," said the doctor.

"Good night, Captain Miles Standish, or whatever be your honoured name."

Rick saluted. "'Richard of the Wilderness,' respected sir. I have chosen to hide my family name because my younger brother has taken my estates, believing me dead, and I will never disturb him," he replied.

"Good night, Takatelka, and you three Indian maidens, whose names I have not heard," added Mrs. Porter, kissing each little girl as their faces were upturned for it, and Nancy over again, last, for good measure.

"Good night!" shouted back the tenters as they walked across the lawn and were lost to sight in the shadow.

CHAPTER XIII

INDIAN GIVERS

THE inside of the tent was delightful. Dark, and somewhat stuffy, it enveloped the children with its mystery as soon as they entered it, letting the canvas flap that served as door fall behind them. Outside was the half-light of a clear summer night, moonless, but radiant with stars. Inside there was no light, only, as the eye got sufficiently accustomed to the murkiness, the streak, that was rather lessened darkness than light, around the base of the tent, where the sides rose up slightly from the ropes fastening it to its stakes, and the crack that marked the entrance.

"Isn't it splendid?" whispered Nancy, recoiling from the pole against which she had struck her forehead. "It's the most mysterious place! I could imagine anything in here."

"Don't you whisper, Nancy! What are you whispering for? There isn't any one near us, and, anyhow, you aren't saying anything they couldn't hear. If you whisper I shall go outside and sit on something all night long," cried Doris.

The other four burst out in a laugh that should have allayed Doris' nervousness.

"It's more fun to be mysterious," declared Nancy.

"Is it!" exclaimed Doris. "I don't see why. It's creepy out here, and I'd rather hear loud talking. Can't we have a light?"

"I have some candles," said Nancy, diving into a bag that hung on her arm. "But light will bring in all the mosquitoes and moths and those clumsy hard things, that batter themselves so dreadfully, that there are in Christendom. Let's go to bed in the dark."

"Don't go to bed in anything, yet," remonstrated Rick. "I've got to bivouac all night, and it will seem long."

"What is it? How do you do it?" inquired Cord.

"Oh, it's camping without tents," explained Rick with a laugh. "I'm going to march up and down, guarding you, probably all night; I shall not be sleepy. But if I am I shall roll myself in a blanket and lie down wherever I happen to be."

"Well, I'd look out I didn't happen to be on a rock when I got sleepy," commented Mimi, with a giggle.

"I might move a few feet off if I did get sleepy on one," Rick vouchsafed. "I wish you girls would choose names. Nancy is Takatelka and I'm Richard of the Wilderness, a nobleman born, but concealing my name and title. Now you three others are Indian maidens, driven out by your tribe, so taking refuge with the white settlers. What will you take for your names?"

"Gracious, I don't know a single one!" cried Doris.

"Minnehaha!" announced Mimi triumphantly.

"Ha-ha, Minnie!" cried Cord, and the others shrieked with laughter, though they could not tell whether Cord meant to be funny and was clever, or whether this hit was an accident.

"You can't take such a name as that; that's a white name, Minnie!" said Nancy. "Mimi can be Minnehaha; that's all right. I wish I had thought of looking in Hiawatha for more: I forgot that we should need them."

"The only thing I know about Indian names and talk is that when they're in books they just grunt. It's all Woughs and ugh and things like that! Really, if you were writing pig language it would look just like Indian language in stories!" declared Doris disgustedly.

"That's true," agreed Mimi. "Rick and Nancy, you must name Doris and Cord."

"All right," Rick accepted the commission in part. "Doris shall be Oogawoosha; that is about the way she says Indian language sounds. Now, Nancy, you name Cord."

Nancy considered. "Cord shall be Allasoota; that's not a bad name," she announced at last.

"You mean all to suit her!" cried Rick. "That's just as good; let's call her Altasoota for fun."

"No; Nancy named me Allasoota, and that's what my name is," declared Cord decidedly.

"Did you ever in all your life hear such names?" cried Mimi. "If anybody came around in the night all we'd have to do is call out: Wake up, Altasoota, Minnehaha, Takatelka, Oogawoosha! and they'd simply scoot. They'd think we were part of an insane asylum, put outside to sleep because we were dangerous!"

"Well, that's a good thing," said Nancy. "But nobody'll come around in our own grounds, and you mustn't talk about it because Doris is fidgety. Let's go to bed now. Sorry, Rick, but you've got to go on guard sometime, and it will seem long no matter how late we go to bed."

"That's so," said Rick. "Good night, my fair red maidens. I hope you will sleep well, and remember that the noble Englishman that guards you is grateful and will not suffer your tribe to come and take you away. Say, if any of you girls wake up and want to come out to talk to me in the night, I'd be glad, because it will be yards long." With which abrupt transition from the stilted language of romance to every-day school-boy American Rick departed to amuse himself with his lively imagination by acting the part of the sentry of the friendly Indian maidens' tent.

"We won't undress," said Mimi decidedly. "We'll take off our dresses and put on the things your mother wants us to wear, and take off our shoes, but I won't lie down to sleep out of doors regularly undressed."

"No," said Nancy. "I didn't mean to, either. But we must be comfortable."

So they made themselves comfortable with unfastened waists and bands, slipped on the soft woollen garments which already began to feel welcome as the dews and the depths of green around and above the tent cooled its small interior.

The four little girls lay down on their bed of fragrant branches, which were unexpectedly springy and comfortable, thickly spread above and below with soft blankets and eider lined quilts.

Each of the others was so anxious to sleep with Nancy that they drew lots by the light of her candle, which she lit for that purpose, and hurriedly extinguished.

Cord jubilantly flourished her victory, represented by the longest strip, and Nancy, seeing how downcast Mimi and Doris looked as she blew out the candle, said:

" We'll begin this way, but we can change around in the night, if we happen to wake up. I suppose we shall sleep like tops, though, it's so lovely out here."

With which remark the four dropped themselves in pairs on the two beds, with a sigh apiece of satisfaction.

Immediately Doris sat up. " What's that?" she cried sharply.

Then Rick's voice reached them from outside. " Who goes there?" he challenged.

Mimi and Doris clutched each other in the dark, Cord, who did not know what fear was, said: " I bet Letty Hetty's coming round to scare us!"

"No, Letty Hetty wouldn't do that," whispered Nancy, her heart in her throat.

"Who goes there?" repeated Rick. "A friend? Advance, then, friend, and give the countersign." There was silence, and the strained ears of the girls could hear no step. Then the flap of the tent lifted and they all screamed but Cord, who sat up, staring in the dark, and boldly demanded: "Who's that?"

There was no answer, but something sniffed rapidly, and Fred bounded up on the bed, over Cord headlong, and began to lick and chew Nancy's hands, whining and sobbing with joy.

"Oh, that horrid, horrid dog!" gasped Doris, dropping back on her pillow with the indignation of a reaction after a thorough fright.

"No, indeed! He's a darling to miss me and find me!" said Nancy indignantly. "Lie down on the foot of your mother's bed, Fredlings, darling, and you shall stay here all night."

Rick marched up to the door of the tent. "Frightened, Takatelka, Minnehaha, Allasoota, Oogawoosha? It was but a devoted friend, that begged me to allow him to share my work of guarding you. Do not fear; I will not suffer you to be captured."

"Oh, Rick, talk sensible!" exclaimed Doris pettishly. "It's awful to keep up such a string!"

Nancy opened her lips to protest, but it was so dark that no one saw her, and, reflecting that Doris was too nervous to enjoy this night of witchery as the others did, she made no comment on her spoiling Rick's fine flow of making-believe.

For a long time the little girls talked, told stories, sang, and for a while Rick added a word, or a voice to the song when his sentry march brought him near the door. Then he dropped out of sound altogether, and the "Indian maidens" wondered whether he could have gone to sleep.

The night grew still, so still that the hours and the movement of the world seemed to have stopped. It was so still that Nancy, lying silent, for the four little Indians had ceased to chatter, felt as though she were sunken into a depth like the bottom of a lake, where no one had ever been before, and where no one could ever reach her.

Cord fell asleep at last, but Mimi and Doris were awake, as Nancy discovered by a whispered question once in a while. In imagination she could feel them holding tight to each other, for nothing but fear could have kept them silent so long. Nancy was not afraid, not in the sense of dreading any danger, but delicious thrills of nervousness ran up and down her spine as she listened in the darkness to the silence of the night. Suddenly, out of the stillness rose a cry, quavering, shrill, desolate. It made Nancy's pulses leap and then stop for an instant. She heard Doris groan and Mimi moved so quickly and violently that Nancy knew she had dove down under the blankets.

The cry came again, nearer, clearer, more awful, yet in its repetition Nancy recognized it for the complaint of a little owl, and she laughed.

"Don't laugh!" came in muffled tones from Doris.

"Is that Rick scaring us?" asked Mimi indistinctly from her blanket burrow.

"No; it's an owl! Don't you hear it?" laughed Nancy. "It frightened me dreadfully at first. Let's get up and go out."

"Goodness! I guess I won't!" said Doris emphatically. "And Aunt Augusta is right; it's horrid sleeping out of doors in a tent."

"I don't think it would be horrid *sleeping* out of doors, but it is a little horrid lying awake — yet even that isn't so bad. It's so still, though! I never knew anything could be so still — I never even knew *nothing* could be so still!"

Nancy laughed again, and the other two heard her rise and her feet drop on the tent floor with a soft, pit-a-pat. "I'm going out. I wish one of you would come, but I'm going, anyway. I'd like to move around, and I'm going to find out what Rick's doing. Then, maybe, if we ate some of the things Letty Hetty gave us we'd go to sleep."

"I wouldn't go outside for a mint of money, and I want Mimi to stay with me to keep me company, if you go out," said Doris.

"What kind of mint is a mint of money?" asked Cord unexpectedly, having awakened in this conversation. "Is it peppermint, spearmint, or what?"

"It's the mint where they make money, gold and silver money," said Doris.

"As though you didn't know it wasn't plant mint, Cordie!" cried Nancy. "You come with me, and let Mimi and Doris keep safe together, if they want to."

"How many candles did you bring, Nancy?" asked Mimi. "I wish we could burn them the rest of the night."

"We could, I suppose; it gets light by four now, maybe earlier," said Nancy. "But we'd be eaten up by insects. We'd look just like that model of

Jerusalem they've bought for the Sunday-School, the papier maché one, with the hills all raised in lumps."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mimi wearily. "I believe I'd just as soon look all lumpy as lie here in the dark where I can't look at anything."

"We are playing we are Indian maidens," said Nancy, suddenly recalling this fact. "We ought to keep it up all the time, in our own minds. Then we'd enjoy to-night more, and besides, we said we'd do that. I'm sure Rick is keeping up his part every minute! Just think how crazy we were to try staying in the tent all night!"

"I should say we were! Crazy as loons, or we wouldn't have done it!" Doris agreed with her by a perversion of Nancy's meaning.

Nancy gave up persuading Mimi and Doris to try to be content, as well as in tent, lifted the flap and crept out into the night, followed by faithful Cord at her heels — but Cord was always ready for any adventure.

It was so beautiful standing under the dome of the sky, all bright with stars, luminously crossed by the Milky Way, feeling the soft, cool breeze of the hour after midnight drift over their faces, that Nancy and Cord stood perfectly still for a little while letting the wonders of that solemn, lonely beauty sink into their souls.

Cord stirred first. "I didn't know the middle of the night was so nice," she said. "Where'd you s'pose Rick got to?"

"He must be doing sentry work over on the other side of the tent somewhere, Allasoota," returned Nancy. "We'll walk around and find him."

They walked around — and they found him! That noble young Englishman, Sir Richard of the Wilderness, had tried heroically to do his self-appointed work of guarding the four young Indian maidens, but the heaviness of sleep had swamped him. He had rolled himself up in his blanket, in approved bivouac fashion, and had lain down on the grass to sleep the sleep of a healthy youth of his brief years!

"Well, I declare! The only one of our camp that is asleep is our guardian!" exclaimed Nancy.

Rick stirred, hearing her reproach in his sleep, sat up, rubbed his eyes, yawned from the deepest depths of himself, and jumped up.

"How — did — you — wake — up?" he stammered. Then he realized where they were and what they were doing, and was fully awake.

"Takatelka and — and —" he hesitated. "And Oldsnoozer —"

"Allasoota!" Cord corrected him indignantly.

"That's it! I beg your pardon, but I never knew a single Indian till I came to the New World, and their names are hard to me," the knight apologized. "Allasoota and Takatelka, why are you wandering around? What made you wake up?"

"Nobody's been asleep, except Allasoota for a few little minutes, and you," said Takatelka, with a twinkle that was visible in the starlight. "We came out to see where you were; we wondered why we didn't hear you marching. Minnehaha and Oogawoosha are scared. An owl came and screeched, and it made us all pretty nearly stiff, till we found out what it was. Sir Richard, we are going to eat a supper, or a breakfast, or whatever it ought to be called, out of our basket. Don't you want some?"

"Yes, I do! I mean: Thank you, fair Copper Maiden. I will right gladly accept your kind invitation to enter your tent and share your meal," replied the guardian gallantly.

"Minnehaha, Oogawoosha, please bring the basket out here; we're going to eat under the stars, sitting on the grass, after the fashion of our tribe," announced Takatelka, putting her head in at the opening.

Mimi and Doris quickly obeyed her summons, and appeared, rumpled and somewhat out of sorts for lack of sleep, with the basket between them. They dropped down on the grass, Sir Richard, Takatelka and Allasoota beside them, and Fred, betraying the liveliest interest in this phase of the peculiar night, came and wriggled himself between his mistress and the guard, not intending to be forgotten in the division of viands. Mimi and Doris cheered up as they munched on slices of chicken held in one hand and alternating bites of the lettuce sandwich held in the other.

Letty Hetty had judged wisely that the tenting band would not sleep much, but would be, therefore, capable of eating much. She had put up a hearty meal for five, yet there was left of it only two scrubby broken lettuce sandwiches, some large cake crumbs and some chicken skin when the repast was over — and these Fred disposed of at the first suggestion.

"We ought to be able to go to sleep now," said Nancy, shaking the basket for Fred's benefit.

"I suppose we couldn't get into the house, your house, without waking everybody up?" remarked Mimi, to the stars apparently.

"My, don't I wish we could!" exclaimed Doris fervently. "Now, honest, Nancy, we've tried it, and we wanted to try it, but what's the use of going back into that tent? It's dreadful, so lonesome! And out here, in the middle of the night — ugh!" Doris shuddered.

"That was exactly like an Indian," giggled Mimi. "But it isn't much like one to want to go back into the house, is it? Still, I do, too."

"It isn't one bit like one," said Nancy sadly. "I don't care so very, very much about staying out the rest of the night myself, but I would do it, and I'd never have said so, if you hadn't."

"We wouldn't wake them up, though, so what's the use?" said Cord.

"Mamma told me she would leave the low window in the pantry unfastened, *in case,*" admitted Nancy.

Rick laughed, tumbling over on the grass. "Oh, but your mother does know things!" he cried. "I don't mind going home, but I hate to give up anything, and I can go to sleep on the grass just as well as I did."

"I hate to give up things, too," agreed Nancy.

"But we haven't slept, and I don't suppose we shall, and we could crawl in that window without any one hearing us, and go to sleep in my room and the guest room, if Mimi and Doris want to."

"We do," said Doris. "There isn't any sense in being out here alone. I'm fidgety enough to fly, and creeps go crawling over me — and bugs, too, I'm sure of it!"

"All right. Camp's broken," said Rick. "We'll just cut over to the house; nobody'll be here to touch anything."

The five, with Fred approving, walked swiftly across the grass to the house, the sickle of an old moon rising to add its light to the brilliant night.

At the pantry window Cord was first "boosted." Rick turned to the three larger girls.

"You're all Indians, all right!" he said. "Indian givers. You give yourselves to the tent for the night, and then you take yourselves away from it again."

"I don't care; Mimi and I feel better already," said Doris, clambering up like a cat, without waiting for help.

"Will you be any better able to take the part of Takatelka in the pageant, Nancy?" asked Rick, laughing.

"I believe I shall be," Nancy answered. "I lay there imagining I was an Indian maiden, till I believe I do know more about one."

She followed Doris then, with a hand from Rick, Mimi came next, Rick last of all, and quietly they crept up-stairs to civilized beds, and to sleep.

CHAPTER XIV

SEWING AND SOWING

CHAGFORD was practically nothing but a rehearsal. Every day rehearsals for the pageant went on, rehearsals of solos, duets, quartettes, choruses, rehearsals of single, a few, many, whole groups of performers — not yet rehearsals of the entire thing. These were to come later, when all these separate rehearsals were to be combined into a smooth sequence of the whole, and the professional leader of the orchestra, the professional trainer of the actors, would take it all in hand for vigorous work. The pageant was taking on far greater proportions than Miss Belinda Allaire had foreseen in proposing it.

The pageant would not be given until September, a time not too far distant to allow the performers to perfect themselves in their parts.

In the meantime Nancy was having pleasant summer hours of playtime between her hours of drilling for the pageant. It was quite decided that she was to be Takatelka, the Indian girl who had saved the lives of Chagford's founders, hence the life of Chagford itself, by bringing them distilled herbs, compounded after the knowledge of her tribe, when they were ill to death, many miles from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, on this spot which was to be the site of Chagford.

Nancy had grown reconciled to her rôle, the most important one of those enacted by the younger girls in the pageant, though she still dreaded the day when, in her russet short skirt, leather leggings, feathers, beads and bright stripes of trimming, she should walk out before the great audience to impersonate the deliverer. But the evil of that day would be sufficient to itself; in the meantime she was having a happy and crowded summer.

She sat on the arm of her father's chair one afternoon, curling his hair on her fingers while he was waiting for her mother to get ready to go with him for a night and a day spent with an old college friend of his. Nancy did not mind staying with Letty Hetty for so short a time without them, and Rick would be there to keep her company.

Mrs. Porter's step was heard on the stairs and the doctor arose hastily.

"You must have made me look like a son of Medusa and Jim Crow!" he said. "I must get my hair in order, or your mother will travel in the opposite direction from me! Nancy, what a nuisance you are!"

"Yes, sir; that's why I am your assistant — I assist you in being a nuisance to Mrs. Porter!" said Nancy. "Doctor Mark Porter is all ruffled up, mamma," she added to her mother, just arrived on the scene, as her father hurried off to put himself again in order. "I've been curling his hair while he was talking to me and he has gone to brush it. He isn't very grateful for the way I work to make him beautiful! He'll be right back, he said."

"Oh, well, there's plenty of time," said the doctor's wife, one of whose most delightful traits was that she never got flustered when she was going out.

Nancy watched Stephen drive her father and mother away, and then sat in the hammock awhile, idly looking down the driveway where they had disappeared. Already she was counting the hours till she should see them returning, for there was something wrong with all of Nancy's world when these two beloved people were out of reach.

Finally Nancy pulled herself up from the hammock and wandered out, across the lawn, and out toward the upper side of her father's place, where the tent had been placed for the five children's camping night. Fred, at her heels, bounced and barked along and Bumblebee followed awhile, then sat down to wash her face and await her mistress' return.

Nancy wandered aimlessly toward the tent. Being there, equally aimlessly, she lifted the flap to enter. She started back, badly frightened, for there, face downward on one of the bough beds, now stripped of covering, lay a woman.

Nancy began to run toward home, then she stopped herself, and stood debating. Her father was away, her mother, too; Stephen was not in the house to help her, Letty Hetty was busy. Nancy herself was properly the head of the house, left alone to represent the family. She turned and retraced her steps, no longer running, but not allowing herself to lag, though she was tempted to.

Nancy this time walked into the tent, up to the prostrate figure and lifted its head, fearing what she should see. But the woman was not dead. Nancy had seen enough of illness to know that this was a faint; plainly the first thing that the doctor's assistant must do was to revive this stranger.

Beyond the tent, not far from it, there was a spring. Nancy pulled her patient over on her back, heaped the boughs higher under her head and ran as fast as her feet would carry her in pursuit of water.

The doctor had fastened a German stone drinking stein to a rock beside the spring, and Nancy pulled with all the strength of her delicate hands to break its chain. Not succeeding this way, she took a jagged stone, held the chain taut with her foot, and struck it several times. It parted and Nancy caught up the stein, filled it at the spring, and ran, faster than she had come, back to her patient.

She found her struggling toward partial consciousness and with a quiet skill that merited her the title of the doctor's little assistant, Nancy put the cold water to the woman's parted lips and gently sprinkled and bathed her temples and wrists with the corner of her handkerchief wet in the fresh water.

Nancy's patient opened her eyes, gasped and tried to sit up. Nancy then noticed for the first time how young she was, not much older than Louise Willis, and that she was pretty.

"Lie still," said Nancy gently. "You are not strong enough to get up."

"Who are you?" asked the girl.

"'LIE STILL,' SAID NANCY GENTLY."

"Papa says I am his assistant," smiled Nancy. "My father is Doctor Porter, so, if I am his assistant, it is right for me to take care of you. After you have rested a little I shall help you to walk down to the house, and take better care of you."

The girl began speaking; she spoke slowly, feebly, but she seemed anxious to explain herself. By degrees she said: "I came to see your mother last month, to ask for sewing, but she was in Boston, and the woman that works for you didn't seem to think there would be anything for me to do here. I have been staying at the Falls; I had a room there, but — well, my money gave out and I have not had much to eat lately. I started to come to see your mother, to ask her to give me sewing to do, this afternoon. I felt queer, ill, so I turned into this tent to get out of the hot sun. I suppose I fainted and you found me. My name is Dean Okley."

"Why, Dean is a boy's name!" cried Nancy.

"It is my name, and I am not a boy," said the girl with a shadow of a smile. "It is a surname; it was my mother's maiden name."

"Not that it matters whether it is a boy's name or a girl's," added Nancy. "You poor thing; I'm so sorry! But you needn't worry one bit. Mamma will get you sewing — Oh, I know! Why, we'll settle it right off, so you can feel better and sleep well to-night! I'll get you sewing myself! I'll tell Miss Belinda Allaire, and she will have you make costumes for the pageant! They've been talking about getting some one. Isn't that lucky? All you've got to do is to get strong enough to work, and I know there'll be no end of it for you. Now, you come down to the house with me — can you, if I help you? You can lay your hand on my shoulder and we'll walk like snails. You can go right to bed after you've had a good supper, and begin to get strong enough to sew as soon as you fall asleep!"

"I'm not sick; I'm — hungry," Dean said, and a faint blush stole up into her white cheeks, for she was not of the sort to whom it is easy to acknowledge poverty.

"Letty Hetty is the best cook in all Chagford," said Nancy cheerfully, with the instinctive tact that made her beloved by every one. "We'll plan what we'd like for supper as we go down; it ought to help you to walk." She laughed softly. "I'm hungry, too. I think Letty Hetty has some beef stock; we'll have soup, shall we? And a little broiled steak and some of Letty Hetty's delicious foamy mashed potatoes, and some boiled rice, and fruit — does that sound good? Then try to walk down to get it!"

The girl arose with tears in her eyes, tears of weakness and of gratitude for the kindness this little girl showed her, the gentleness that took her in and treated her as if she were not a stranger.

Dean trembled, but shook her head when Nancy offered her shoulder as a support. "I can walk without troubling you, dear little doctor's assistant! Your name is not hard to understand!" she said.

They walked slowly, very slowly, down to the house, often pausing and finally with Dean's hand resting on Nancy's shoulder as she grew more tired.

Arrived on the piazza Nancy put the stranger into the hammock, pushed the down pillows into place beneath her head, and ran away to pour rapidly out to Letty Hetty the story of her adventure.

Letty Hetty could not have been so long the inmate of the doctor's home and the trusted friend of his family that she was had she not had a great heart under her gaunt exterior and crisp manner.

"Well, Jerusalem Halifax Gentleman!" she cried now. "To think that I discouraged the poor girl from comin' back to ask for sewin' till she'd like to have starved to death for lack of funds! I'm sure I'd no idea of discouragin' her so completely. I said I didn't know whether or not Mrs. Porter had any work; that she was pestered all the time with one application or another! You did just right, Nancy, to bring her down here. We'll get her a good supper, and put her to bed right after it in the little yellow bed-room. In the meantime I'm goin' to take her — or let you — a glass of your mother's grape juice and a thin slice of bread and butter to eat with it. That'll get her ready for solid things — and I'll see she has a supper, poor child!"

Dean drank the grape juice, ate the thin, fine bread and sank back into the hammock to rest with a feeling of confidence and peace that warmed her heart as the warm grape juice warmed her chilled veins.

Later she certainly had the supper that Letty Hetty's tone of speaking of it to Nancy implied that she would have, and went immediately to a long and sweet night's rest in the small yellow bed-room at the further end of the hall, where voices, if there were any, could not reach her.

And a little later there were voices, many of them! Nancy and Rick sat on the piazza discussing Dean Okley, her curious name, her pathetic prettiness, which was of a drooping, frail sort, her far more pathetic story, when the Coggs automobile rushed down the street and stopped at the doctor's gate. Instantly its door burst open and all four of the double twins flew out, followed by Miss Drummond, and ran up the steps, hailing Nancy with: "Hallo, dear little Nancy! We knew you were alone, so we came down. We're a surprise party!"

"Are you?" asked Nancy, "I'm glad you came."

"We're always a surprise party," declared Taizie. "Don't we always surprise everybody? The rest are on their way; we passed 'em — Louise and Amabel Willis, Mimi, Doris and Cordie, all coming to see you."

"What fun!" cried Nancy. "Miss Drummond, please take this rocker; mamma likes it best. I have a surprise for you, too, all of you. I'm glad you came to-night; I could hardly wait till to-morrow to see if you'd do what I want you to."

"Sure we will — I mean, indeed we will!" Daisy corrected herself in response to a warning smile and a lifted eyebrow from Miss Drummond. "We're just as certain to do it as we are to like it. Do you notice how we're getting on? We hardly ever say 'you was' now, nor 'ain't,' nor — oh, there are more of 'em, but I can't think what they are this minute! Miss Drummond's the best ever!"

"Oh, Daisy, what a fall! When you were boasting your improvement!" laughed Miss Drummond. "'The best ever!'"

"The best teacher ever was," said Daisy, unabashed. "We can't remember every single thing, every single time, but we're getting there! I mean we are getting trained," Daisy added hastily as her hearers laughed. "When we have gone so far we don't slip up on some things we have been trying to keep hold of we're going to call her by her first name, Rhoda. She isn't much older than we are, and we're going to be real friends."

"I thought we were real friends now, Daisy, dear," said Rhoda Drummond, with an affectionate look at Daisy.

Nancy watched Miss Drummond. She looked happy, well, pretty, young. How different from the pallid girl whom she had visited that morning with the doctor! Nancy wondered if that other, younger girl up-stairs, the little sempstress whom she had discovered that afternoon, might also be helped into happiness, which means health.

"Nancy brought us together," said Miss Drummond as if answering Nancy's thought. "We are all grateful to our little Nancy!"

The other three little girls came up at that moment, under Louise's protection, and those already arrived made room for them on the piazza.

"We just came to have some fun, Nancy," said Cord.

"Would you let me tell you something first?" asked Nancy. "I was going to see you all in the morning, but you've come. I felt as though I couldn't wait, anyway."

"Surely, Nancy, dear," said Louise. "We'll sit as still as mice while you tell us your story, or confess your wickedness — which is it?"

She drew Nancy close to her, having discovered the shy, but profound admiration for her which the little girl felt.

"Oh, wait a moment!" cried Rick, with an inspiration. He ran into the house and came out with his violin.

"I'm going to play an accompaniment for the story," he said.

Nancy glanced at him, understanding — Rick and she always understood each other. He was going to make a thread of tender, pathetic music wind in and about the tale of the little sempstress, poor, homeless, fainting from hunger on the bare bough bed in the deserted tent. And the music of a violin, when it chooses to tell the story of suffering, can so tell it that it clutches the heart and makes it respond with pity.

"I hope I can make them care about her!" thought Nancy. "I'm sure they will, but, if they don't, there are mamma, papa and the Misses Allaire. Girls," she said aloud, "this is a true story; I am part of it and some one else, and all of you are to be part of it, too!"

Smiling, Rick played chords and little subdued flourishes as Nancy spoke, meaning to say: "Girls, this is the prelude!"

Nancy told the story of the little sempstress well, simply, gently, with pity and appeal in the silvery, sweet voice which, on any subject, found its way into hearts. And as she told the story Rick played, lovely, soft minor melodies into which Nancy's voice unconsciously fell, leaning on the violin and following it.

"Now," said Nancy, ending amid the silence of her audience, "what I want to do, Louise, girls, is to tell Dean Okley when I go up-stairs to bed tonight that all of you will let her sew for you. Will you? Then she will know right away that she is safe. Will you let her make costumes for the pageant, Louise, or perhaps sew for you on regular things, to wear mornings, maybe, till you find out whether she knows how? And will you get your mother, Mimi, to try her? And Doris, will you ask your aunt? And you, Maizie, all you Coggs twins?"

"Will we!" cried the Coggs girls, jumping up in a whirl of mingled love for Nancy and pity for the young thing, less fortunate and not much older than themselves.

"Why, we'll have her up there to stay, at the palace, and she needn't sew a stitch!" cried Maizie. "Or not till she's all right again, and then — why, we could give her some money, a couple of hundred, or something, and let her know she's got something to begin on!"

Nancy shook her head. "If you'll just let her sew and earn her money, she'd like that better," she said.

"Yes, generous Coggs girls," laughed Louise, "Nancy is right. Give the girl a chance and be good to her, but don't let her feel she does not really own what she has. I knew, while Nancy was talking, that you'd want to smother her in bank notes! Nancy, darling, we'll give her more pageant sewing than her tired little fingers can do, unless you dear

Porters, your father and mother when they come back, make those tired fingers strong and rested. Tell your girl with the curious name that Chagford is overflowing with sewing just now, and she shall have all that she can do. Wasn't that a dear story to hear, Miss Drummond? Don't you think it is all lovely?"

Rhoda Drummond and Louise exchanged glances above Nancy's brown head, each admiring her rapt, dilated gray-blue eyes, the glad, stirred look on the delicate oval of the dear child's face.

"I have never heard a little story that moved me more — with Rick's accompaniment. What made you think of that, Richie?" asked Miss Drummond.

"It belonged," said Rick, as if that explained — as it did.

"We'll all let her make our costumes, Nancy," said Amabel, almost timidly. Since Maizie Coggs had returned good for evil by nominating Amabel as Queen of the Water Revel Amabel had been subdued, almost humble, when she found herself with Nancy and the twins together. Amabel's small world of conventions and prejudices, of distinct labelling of "nice people" and "common people" had tumbled about her ears. She had the air of an exceedingly handsome, girlish edition of Humpty Dumpty, pleading to be put up safe and sound on her wall again.

“How dear you all are! I know you will, Amabel!” cried Nancy, rising as her friends rose to go. Somehow the end of Nancy’s story seemed to bring the end of the evening. Nobody felt like playing games after encountering real things.

“I’m going to tell Dean Okley how lovely you all are, and that she needn’t worry one bit — just go to sleep and get ready to sew.”

“Perhaps you have been doing a little sowing, too, Doctor Porter’s assistant?” suggested Louise. “There are two ways of spelling sowing, you know!”

Nancy looked blissfully happy. “I didn’t do a thing, but happen to wander up to the tent,” she said.

Hazie Coggs spoke for herself and her sisters. “While you’re telling how lovely we all are, you might tell her you’re the dearest thing in these three villages! Only it would be a waste of time, because she’s found that out by now,” she said.

Her guests all kissed Nancy good night with enthusiasm. After they had gone the little girl turned and found Letty Hetty, just come out.

“They’re so good to me!” Nancy said gratefully, wonder and affection in her eyes.

CHAPTER XV

REAPING

DOCTOR and Mrs. Porter came home the next day. They were surprised to find their family increased by one slight, pale girl of not quite twenty, but not displeased.

"Certainly you did right to keep her here, Assistant," said the doctor heartily when Nancy asked his approval of her action. "What else could you do? She evidently had gone as far as she could go yesterday, and to-day there is no place ready to receive her. We have plenty of room for such a small creature. We must get her up to the point of filling more space, though! I'm quite proud of the efficient way you have carried on my practice during my absence, Doctor N. Porter. You've even gone ahead of me in your practice, for you have established a sanitarium."

"Indeed, you've made this house into a sanitarium often and often, Doctor M. Porter!" laughed Nancy, happily.

Which was true; the big-hearted doctor had many times brought to his home, for a visit and his wife's tender care, some one of his patients who could not otherwise get what was so sorely needed.

So Dean Okley stayed on for a week, in which the Porters would not let her talk of more work than was involved in helping Letty Hetty. She set the table and wiped dishes, or dusted, or shelled peas, performed the light household tasks that are wholesome in themselves and which removed the sense of being a burden that would have retarded the girl's recovery.

It was quite true that she had merely been hungry and discouraged. She gained seven pounds of flesh in that hospitable week in the doctor's house, feasting on the good things Letty Hetty insisted on her eating, enjoying the beautiful home atmosphere which had unexpectedly enveloped her, learning to love the noble doctor and his motherly wife, both of whom simply, and as a matter of course, lived the gospel most of us are content with approving. Dean absorbed some of the wisdom and culture that was theirs to such an unusual degree; no one could help it in their house. It was a week that seemed to the gentle, lonely girl like a glimpse of heaven — but it was only a glimpse of what is as hard to gain — an ideal home.

How much Dean loved Nancy as these happy seven days flew by it would be hard to say.

"Dear little Samaritaine," she called Nancy, out of her slender knowledge of French, because Nancy had "poured wine and oil into her wounds."

At the end of the week Dean insisted on beginning her own work, and Mrs. Porter gave her Nancy's two costumes for the pageant to make. In the evening Water Revel Nancy was to be the Spirit of Chagford, a personage invented by Miss Belinda Allaire out of the need of sprites, fairies, and spirits in general, and much to her own delight.

This Spirit of Chagford was supposed to have guided the settlers to the site of the town in its beginning, and ever since to have presided over its growth and fortunes. Hence Nancy, representing this good spirit, who could neither be proved nor disproved, was to precede all the other characters in the Water Revel. Clad in gauzy white, with her veiled head crowned by an effective wreath of electric lights, fed from a small battery which she would carry concealed, she was to stand on a flat boat and go before the other crafts bearing characters portrayed by Chagford children, beckoning them to follow where she led.

This character Nancy dearly loved: it exactly suited her poetic imagination. For it she was to have made a full white gown of the thinnest material, draped over a silvery slip; it would be as dainty as Takatelka's Indian garb was solid and — to Nancy — unattractive. Upon these two costumes Dean began her career as a little sempstress in Chagford.

"I suppose I may stay here, if you will keep me, till these are done, Mrs. Porter," Dean said. "But I want to find some nice, comfortable, plain little house where they will be glad to take me in as a boarder. You know I'd like to feel that I was really started in life the way I'm going to keep on. I shall board, you know, and go every day to my work — if only people will keep on wanting me! — and I'm anxious to feel that I've really begun."

"And that you are an independent small person, not taking favours from any one!" Mrs. Porter laughed at her.

"No, indeed!" cried Dean eagerly. "I'm not silly independent, I hope! I know how much I shall always owe you, but I want to be somebody, my own self, don't you see?"

" Yes, child, I see perfectly, and you are right. But be my resident sempstress till you find exactly what you hope for in a boarding place. Can't you see, in your turn, how fine it makes me feel to say I have a sempstress entirely my own ? " Mrs. Porter said.

Dean shook her head as she yielded. " You are dreadful people for making one think you are having a favour done you, when you really are charitable," she said.

Dean was fitting the Takatelka costume to Nancy's slender shoulders one morning before she went down to see Grandma Emerson, where Mimi and Doris were to meet her. All three were then going on to the Stone House for one of the rehearsals, which were getting to be a daily matter.

" It mustn't be tight, Dean," Nancy warned her. " Do have the sleeves sort of loose where they go in ! I know I shall feel as though my arms were iron, handing out those medicines to the settlers, so if the sleeves were put in tight I'd never be able to lift my arms at all ! I don't see why in the world Takatelka didn't send her grandmother with those herbs ! I don't think a young Indian girl, like her, ought to have been doctoring people from Boston whom she didn't know ! "

“Never mind, Nancy,” laughed Dean. “There’ll be a lot of people from Boston who know her after this pageant!”

Nancy groaned. “Dean, I know that!” she sighed. “Papa was reading an article aloud — oh, you heard it! That one on hypnotism, and making people do things while they were hypnotized.” Dean nodded, her lips closed over several pins.

“I think I’ll get him to hypnotize me, and let me do Takatelka while I don’t know what’s going on. I’m as sure as anything that I’ll act it just about the way that a poker would!”

Dean removed the pins and dropped them into the small oval plate that held their mates.

“You’ll do it all right when the time comes. It’ll all be so exciting and fine you’ll never once remember who you really are; you’ll feel just like Takatelka,” she said.

Nancy laughed. “That does sound a little like me!” she cried. “How did you know? But I’m afraid it won’t be so.”

“I’ve noticed that you can’t tell yourself from what you’re pretending you are when you and Rick are playing,” said Dean, taking off the Indian girl’s brown tunic and helping Nancy into her own simple white gown. "Good-by, little Sweet; I hope you'll have good luck this morning."

Nancy hurried down-stairs and got from Letty Hetty the basket of canned peaches which that good woman had set aside from her own five dozen, canned for the family's use next winter, to send to Grandma Emerson, to whom fruit canning was becoming wearisome.

"Tell Mrs. Emerson I hope they ain't too sweet," said Letty Hetty. "I'm pretty sure they ain't as good as usual, but maybe she'll make out with 'em, when she's alone and not so particular."

Nancy laughed. "Letty Hetty, I do believe I've never known you to put up peaches — or anything else! — that you didn't say that very same thing," she cried. "Of course they are as good as usual — they usually are!"

Nancy caught up the basket, gave Letty Hetty a hasty pat on the arm and ran off. Letty Hetty looked after her, smiling to herself. "She's gettin' more an' more like her father, the way she says things; I don't see as she looks like him, more'n a kind of a way with her head she has, and the same steady way of lookin' through you," she soliloquized aloud, taking up her oven cloth and stooping to turn her mounting loaves for an even golden brown bake on all sides.

Nancy went down the street as fast as safety to her rather heavy basketful of bumping cans allowed.

Grandma Emerson met her in the doorway — she never missed this little ceremony — and took the basket, listening, smiling, to Nancy's conscientious delivery of Letty Hetty's message. She, too, had learned the value of Letty Hetty's annual misgivings as to her infallible canning and preserving.

"Well, we know beforehand just how Letty Hetty's things always do turn out," said the little old lady, leading the way into her cheery sitting-room. "Mimi and Doris beat you here."

"I see they did. Hallo, M. and D. — well, did you ever!" cried Nancy. "I never once saw that before! Here am I, the doctor's assistant, the most intimate chum of my own darling M. D. I always say that stands for 'My daddy.' And then my two dearest friends are M. D., too — Mimi and Doris! Now isn't that queer?"

"Nancy, it is uncanny!" cried Grandma Emerson, with the merry laugh that had stayed girlish, like her heart and mind, while her tiny body was aging.

"It is queer," agreed both Mimi and Doris, suitably impressed.

"Sit down, Nancy," Grandma Emerson said, pressing Nancy into a chair where the breeze would cool her. "You are warm, coming this sultry morning with your basket on your arm, like little Mabel. Now you've come, I'm going to make you three lassies some lemonade, and I rolled out some cookies last evening and baked them when it was cool. Somehow I'm getting lazy, I guess. I mind work on warm days more than I did."

"You are not going to make that lemonade, Grandma Emerson!" cried Nancy, jumping up. "There's no reason why any one should make it: we don't need it, but if we're to have it, we'll make it ourselves and it will refresh you, too."

"Yes, Grandma Emerson," Mimi and Doris chimed in, jumping up to reinforce Nancy. "Sit right down in your rocker, that you like best, and we'll make our own lemonade and yours, too."

The little girls gently, but firmly, pushed the little old lady into her chair; there was no escaping three against one, as the old lady breathlessly remarked.

"To tell the truth, children," she acknowledged, as one brought lemons out of the cellar way, another fetched sugar, and the third got the glass pitcher and the lemon squeezer from the cupboard, " to tell the truth I had another of those bad attacks two nights ago and it kind of pulls me down."

" Oh, Grandma Emerson! " cried Mimi, and Doris looked solemn.

But Nancy stopped rolling a lemon, as she had been vigorously doing, and held it up to punctuate her discourse. " Grandma Emerson," she said, " it is perfectly dreadful that you stay here alone when you are not well! It worries mamma and papa more than you think, and Letty Hetty and me, and I guess everybody else you know well, and that's pretty much everybody in old Chagford. Won't you, won't you please, *please,* have some one here to live with you? Don't you think you ought to? Wouldn't you say anybody else ought to, if you knew some one who was as little as you are, and not quite, really young, though you do seem almost like us — "

" Nancy, I'm considerable past seventy, and you don't need to go on tip-toe about age, except when you're talking about women under sixty, maybe," laughed Grandma Emerson.

" Well, then," cried Nancy, dropping her lemon on the table and running over to kneel beside the dear little old lady and put her arms about her, "well, then, you are an old lady, a dear, frail, tiny, precious, trying, old lady, and you worry all of us almost to bits! Now, Grandma Emerson, is it right, do you think it is right *right,* you know! — to stay here all alone when you get sick in the night and anything might happen? Won't you give me a present this morning, a lovely un-birthday, August 14th present, of your promise to have some one to live with you? Won't you do this for your own Nancy, Grandma — and Mimi and Doris?"

Nancy nodded and frowned at her friends, unseen by Grandma Emerson, for them to supplement her pleading.

"Oh, please, please, *please,* Grandma Emerson!" begged Mimi and Doris.

"Well, I know it isn't exactly right," admitted Grandma Emerson. "But, bless the children, who could I have? I don't want anybody around all the time; I do mortally hate to let anybody come in here at all. But, maybe, if I could find a nice, quiet, refined person, who would be sensible enough not to pester my life out, not letting me do a speck of my own work, or anything I wanted to do in my own house, why, *maybe* — But, there! Who is there like that to be had?"

Nancy sprang to her feet excitedly, crimsoning under the stress of an inspiration.

"Dean Okley!" she cried. "She's the very one! And you would be doing her good, too! She's so anxious to find a boarding place that she could afford! And she — why, Grandma Emerson, don't you see? If you let her have a room here, and she'd get breakfast for you, I know you'd count it as rent, you wouldn't take money from her, and don't you see how splendid that would be for Dean? And she would be out all day sewing."

"Mercy on us, child, I'm not rich, but I no need to take boarders! I'd let the girl come for company, if she came, just to know somebody was around, if I kept on getting sick," cried Grandma Emerson.

"And it would be — why, nobody could tell what it would be to Dean! Won't you let her come, Grandma?" pleaded Nancy.

"Mercy on us, child, what a terrible little arranger you are getting to be!" Grandma Emerson exclaimed. "I like Dean Okley, she's a nice child, and I do suppose she needs just about what I'd give her. Truth to tell, I'd be kind of relieved to know some one was in the house at night, especially one that wasn't in it daytimes!" She laughed her happy laugh and looked at Nancy whimsically, as she plainly tried to restrain her impatience for the decision she wanted to hear.

"You're your father's assistant sure enough!" said Grandma Emerson. "If you don't know how to practise medicine, you know how to bring things 'round so's people won't need medicine; happiness is a wonderful healer! Well, Nancy Porter, I see by the way you're clasping and unclasping your hands you're pretty nearly flying into inch pieces to hear me say: 'Yes, I'll take Dean Okley, if she'll come to live with me! Very well; you did hear me say it, didn't you? Just now?"

"Do you mean you will let her come?" cried Nancy. And the other two cried: "Will you? Will you?"

"Mercy on us! Yes, I will," said Grandma Emerson. "Oh, my heart!" she cried as her three visitors hurled themselves upon her. "I will if I survive you! Go make your lemonade, you three little plotters, especially Nancy Porter! I'm sure I don't see why you're so pleased!"

"Yes, you do! Yes, you do!" cried Nancy. "Mamma and papa will be delighted; they have been worried about you. And only think how glad Dean will be to have a home. She will do everything she can think of for you, I know she will. She's so nice! And all the money she earns will be hers for other things, instead of board. It's too lovely to take in all at once! Don't I wish we could go right home and tell them about it, instead of going to that rehearsal! But we must wait till that's over. Indeed I'm glad!"

The lemonade tasted more delicious than any lemonade had ever tasted, and, when the three girls, warm and breathless, for hurrying in August is hard work, reached Miss Allaire's the rehearsal went better than it had ever gone before. They were a little late for it, so, till it was over, they could not pour out their great news to those whose affection for Grandma Emerson and interest in Dean would make them rejoice at it.

" Do you go about fitting homeless young women to young womenless homes, Nancy?" asked Rhoda Drummond. " Here am I, happy with the double twins and they with me, by your suggestion, and now Mrs. Emerson and this Dean Okley! Isn't it funny? A beautiful sort of funniness, though, as if it was the play of baby guardian angels, doing unlooked for things to make mortals happy!"

" You know I didn't do anything: it has only come about," said Nancy abashed.

"Oh, you little doctor's assistant!" cried Taizie Coggs, hugging Nancy. "You never do a thing — but just keep on not doing these sort of things, will you! Just keep right on assisting."

Nancy laughed, crimson, but happy, feeling, somehow, as one should, that the love she received was due to other people's goodness, not to her own.

"No one could any more have helped thinking of you and Miss Drummond, and of Grandma Emerson and Dean than of putting on shoes when you got up in the morning — there were bare feet, and there were shoes; you had to put them together!" she cried.

"Nancy is learning the secret of the little moonstone ball ahead of time! I do believe it has slipped through the stone and into her heart as she has worn it!" cried Miss Belinda.

"Has it to do with these things?" asked Nancy.

"No questions, Pandora!" laughed Miss Belinda. "You are to learn the secret on your birthday, not before. But you come very near to guessing it, little Nancy, as one would know that your father and mother's little girl would come."

CHAPTER XVI

THE PAGEANT

SEPTEMBER came, its second week came, and in that second week — The Day!

The railroad that united old Chagford to the outside world, the other road that had a small station, chiefly used for freight from the mills, at Chagford Falls, both ran extra trains to bring the crowds that flocked to see the pageant. People came from Boston — among these Mrs. Lawrence and her son and daughter — and from all the lesser towns and cities between. People not only came in trains, but they drove to Chagford from every point accessible in a single day's drive, so that by the afternoon of the first day of the pageant, the one on which the Water Revel was to be held at night, every hotel, large and small boarding-house, and every private house that would consent to receive a guest was full of strangers.

The Chagford hospital was assured, that was evident before counting up receipts, and the small shops of Chagford had never known such a rush of business.

" I can't eat, mamma; there isn't one bit of use in trying," said Nancy, pushing back her plate at supper, yet taking a hasty taste of the luscious peach which Letty Hetty had cut up to tempt her. " I'm not hungry, and there's the whole pageant holding my throat together, so I can't swallow. Please let me go get dressed, because I have tried to eat my very best."

" Run along, then, Sweetheart," said Mrs. Lawrence, who, of course, was staying with her friend. " Excitement and glory will sustain you till you get home again, and then I hope your father will prescribe a light supper before you go to bed."

" Yes, Nancy, I will excuse you — and Rick, too. I see he is as eager to get into his royal robes as you are to put on your ghostly ones," laughed Mrs. Porter. " I only hope the children of this pageant won't be the first to require the hospital! "

" Mildred, it's all right," said the doctor. " Nancy and Rick won't suffer for being stirred to their depths once in their childhood. I wish I were going to be the King of this Revel myself — or even a small page at his court! Or a small page in the glorious history of this night — either sort of a page would do for me," added the doctor, raising his voice as the children ran away.

"Mark," cried Mrs. Lawrence, "how nice you are with Nancy and that boy! How fine it is to keep your sympathy with childhood as you do! Why didn't they name you Luke, instead of Mark? You are surely 'the beloved physician.'"

"My dear Mary, if you had lost your sympathy with childhood you wouldn't know that I had kept mine!" laughed the doctor. "We shall have to excuse Mildred! Can't you see she is fidgeting to run after Nancy and Rick, to help them dress?"

"So am I, Uncle Mark!" cried Althea Lawrence. "Mayn't I go, too? I'm wild to get up-stairs to help Nancy."

"Oh, go, all of you three grown up little girls!" the doctor growled, twinkling at Miles Lawrence as he spoke. "Miles, you and I will go out on the piazza to smoke a sane cigar and pipe apiece, making in our hearts the thanksgiving prayer of the Jew that we were not created one of that foolish sex!"

Miles laughed. "Speak for yourself, Uncle

Mark," he said. "For my part I'd like to go up and help Rick into his royal raiment."

The doctor groaned, rising at once. "Then we'll all go up and see how the children get on," he said. And it was easy to perceive that this was what he had been aching to do all along.

Nancy was hurrying as though there were not still over an hour of light too strong to allow the water pageant to begin; Mrs. Porter had tea early that night, for Letty Hetty must, of course, go to the Revel.

Nancy's hair had been braided in small tight braids and dampened, so that now its natural weight of silky smoothness had been taken out, and it hung lightly around her shoulders, over the silvery underdress of her costume, like a veil of night.

Dean was examining the floating white upper gown, and then threw it over Nancy's head. It fell soft and full around her, the silver below it gleaming with her every movement.

"That is my veil," explained Nancy, pointing to the mass of gauze that Althea was examining. "I'm going to carry that in a box, and the wreath of electric lights. I'm all ready except that. I want to see Rick now."

"You look all ready, Nancy," said Miles Lawrence. "You look like the White Lady of Avenel!"

"Oh, Miles, that was nice to say!" cried Nancy, delighted. She loved the Monastery and the mocking rhymes of the White Lady most of all of Sir Walter's romances, which her father and she enjoyed so much together.

They all repaired to Rick's room across the hall and found the handsome lad a picture, clad in white and gold, with touches of scarlet here and there, and an ermine mantle, that no one could have guessed was Canton flannel, seen from a distance; his crown was ready to his hand. Rick had dressed rapidly, alone, and was as ready as Nancy was when the admiring elders came to inquire as to his progress.

"Seems an awful shame to look so beautiful for only one night!" said Miles. "I believe we'll have to get up something in Boston next fall, before you kidlets outgrow these splendours, and have you down to wear them!"

"We really could, Miles!" cried Althea, seizing the idea.

"Well, if you're ready, royal sir and ghostly Spirit of Chagford, we'll drive up to the lake. I promised Miss Belinda to get there early, with Miles and Althea, in case she needed help," said the doctor.

Mrs. Porter and Dean wrapped Nancy in a long cloak, and helped Rick into a long, loose raincoat of Mrs. Porter's, which covered his glories from curious eyes.

" We'll meet at the Revel, Mildred. The Coggs girls are sending their car for you, our guests, Letty Hetty and Dean: they won't forget, so I'll feel no more care of your safe arriving," said the doctor, pausing in the doorway before he followed the children to the surrey, waiting at the gate.

" We will be ready when Elijah comes," said Mrs. Lawrence. " Good luck to you, children! "

" Have a good time, Nancy, and do well. Be an honoured king, Richie. Good-bye. I shall watch for you all the evening, we all shall," cried Mrs. Porter. And, with farewell waves of hands and handkerchiefs, Mrs. Porter, Mrs. Lawrence, Althea and Miles watched the actors depart.

It was in the gathering dusk that they followed, later, in the Coggs car. The banks of the lake were hung with lighted lanterns, reflected in the water. All the winding length of the little sheet spectators were crowded, but the doctor, who had been watching for them, led them to seats that Miss

Dorinda Allaire had erected on her property where it bordered the lake, and where she was waiting for them with other friends. The lights everywhere else made one spot on the bank where there were no lights, exceedingly dark, and here the Chagford children who were to take part in the Revel were crowded.

At the signal of a blank shot from a revolver there was rapid motion amid these actors, coming to take their places in their boats. At another shot the boats were illuminated; at another they came out from their moorings on the bank and fell into line. At a fourth they moved — the procession of the Water Revel had begun!

First came Nancy, the Spirit of Chagford. She stood on the flat top of her boat, the seats being covered with a board; a single scull propelled each of the floats, handled by a boy, dressed in the uniform of the night — wine coloured short trousers, pale blue shirts, crossed from left to right with a yellow scarf; a cap with a single quill in its side crowned each head.

Nancy's white garments floated backward in the light breeze made by the slow motion of the boat. Her misty veil floated out over her veil of flying dark hair, the wreath of lights that crowned her gleamed like stars in the summer darkness. Slowly and gracefully she beckoned to the other boats to follow where she led, and soft music from the bank melted into the silence before it was drowned by the applause that greeted this poetical and beautiful figure.

Next came Rick and Amabel, the King and Queen of the Revel, half reclining on a slanting, couch-like throne, which revealed them in all their beauty. There was a murmur, and then loud applause, for Amabel was a picture in her royal robes of white and gold and crimson, and Rick was beautiful, with the perfect and spiritual beauty that was the fitting casket for his artistic and beautiful nature.

"They don't look real!" murmured a little old woman from North Chagford, nor did they. Handsome Amabel and beautiful Rick made a picture never to be forgotten. After them came courtiers and fairies on several boats. Then woodsmen and Puritan maidens; then Revolutionary soldiers, and powdered dames, after the Martha Washington type; then lawmakers and ladies in the tight-waisted coats and vast crinolines of the period "before the war." Then the zouaves and regular soldiers of the Army of the Republic, and girls, in curls and hoopskirts, sewing and knitting and scraping lint, with a dear little round-faced child all alone on a float, her face blackened with burnt cork, dressed in gay colours, with a bandanna around her curly head, representing the Cause of the War and, perhaps "the Underground Railway," in which Chagford had had her share.

Between the floats there was occasionally one that represented an art, or flowers, or a group of fairies, "nothing peculiar to Chagford, but pretty on general principles," Miss Allaire explained to Mrs. Lawrence, who sat next her.

At the end of the long water procession came the Coggs twins, one pair on a float, representing the immigration that had gathered around the mills at Chagford Falls. Maizie, Daisy, Taizie and Hazie had absolutely refused "to be anything pretty," as they put it. "We'd look like chumps," said candid Taizie. "So we're going to be something funny." Maizie represented a German girl, Daisy a Swede, Taizie an Irish girl, Hazie a French Canadian. At the imminent risk of a wetting, they danced what nobody could deny might be jigs of each nation, played and frolicked, and were comical in every look and gesture, enjoying themselves to the top of their bent and making everybody who watched them share their fun. They were the hit of the evening. Nancy was lovely and unearthly, Rick and Amabel gloriously handsome, Louise charming as a Revolutionary dame in powder and kerchief. Mimi was a dear plump mother bidding her soldier son farewell, Doris was dignified and stately, as a matron in a turban pouring tea for a gentleman in stock and strapped trousers, and a coat that made him look like a wasp, but the merry Coggs were decidedly the hit of the Revel, with their frowzy, jolly looking hair, their lively jigs, for people like to laugh, and these four "emigrant girls" were convulsing.

The band that had come from Boston, the Chagford bands united at the head of the lake, all played their best as the floats and the young actors on them circled around and around its curves. The lake was a mile and a half long in a straight line through its centre, but it lengthened itself out into four times that by cunningly curving and twisting itself into a sheet worthy the muscles of the picturesque youngsters sculling the fleet.

After an hour's rowing the floats grouped themselves into tableaux and coloured lights played over them from the shore; it was most beautiful in effect.

Finally, as the clock struck eleven in the distant white meeting-house on Chagford common, itself a witness of the town's growth since it had been part of the colony of his ungracious majesty, George III, the floats fell slightly apart from one another, and, led by the Boston band, the children's voices rose over the water in "The Star Spangled Banner," and the Water Revel was beautifully, impressively ended.

Nancy came flitting into the house, dancing along in her diaphanous draperies.

"My battery held out; I was sure it would fail and my crown disappear, but it held out! Didn't everything go off perfectly, mamma? Weren't you pleased with all of us, papa? Oh, wasn't it lovely? And didn't we make a lot of money? I heard the men that kept the barriers across the three roads to the lake say that they had taken in more than five hundred dollars gate money!" she cried, still dancing, till Althea Lawrence caught her and forced her to stand still.

"More than five hundred! More than a thousand!" said the doctor. "There were over two thousand people, perhaps three thousand there, at fifty cents apiece admission. And to-morrow the tickets are to be from fifty cents to two dollars for reserved seats. Go to bed and go to sleep, Nancy, or you won't be able honestly to do your part in giving the audience their money's worth to-morrow," said her father, and Nancy, kissing them all good night, obediently flitted away, followed upstairs by Rick, not less excited than she was.

Neither Nancy nor Rick could go to sleep for a long, long time, but lay tossing restlessly, seeing the mysterious witchery of the gleaming lights under the trees along the lake banks, hearing the music, feeling the sway of the little boats, and the charm of the pretty figures which they bore along. But, at last, the boy and girl did go to sleep, and Mrs. Porter stole in to darken the windows of both rooms so that they slept in the morning until they were called, and got up, refreshed, to take their share in the events of the day.

The pageant began at two. By one o'clock the gate keepers of the roads leading to the natural amphitheatre where it was to be held had all that they could do taking in the receipts from the crowds, driving and walking, who were thronging to see the tableaux. Ropes had been stretched across these streets and roads, and no one might pass, except by buying a ticket to the pageant, by order of the Chagford authorities.

The performers had badges to admit them and, what with part actors, choruses, groups and so on,

"A LITTLE FIGURE IN MOCCASINS AND WOOD-COLOURED TUNIC."

two thirds of the people in Chagford were performers. Doctor Porter was taking part: he and Nancy and Rick came early to the place, costumed at home and enveloped in concealing coats. So many people were driving along Chagford's quiet streets in this guise that the effect was mysterious.

The pageant opened with a prologue spoken by one of the clergymen of Chagford, setting forth the purport of the representation. Then followed a stirring chorus, and the first scene was set, representing a group of pilgrims, gathered together in their English home, bidding farewell to relatives and friends, before setting forth to the wilderness in the West.

Then followed the coming of the settlers from Massachusetts Bay to Chagford, and their planting their standard in the soil, and the singing of "God Save the King," — the foundation of the town.

The next tableau showed the settlers desperately ill, far from human help, the forest, and the dreaded Red Men alone surrounding them. Then, from out the trees there crept a little figure in moccasins and wood-coloured tunic, feathers in her long, dark braids, beads and feathers on her skirt and breast, gay fringe on her long brown leggings. It was Nancy, as Takatelka, according to the legend of

Chagford, coming to rescue the white men. No longer afraid, but feeling her part, as Dean had prophesied that she would, Nancy stole out of her ambush, shading her eyes with her hand, creeping on with a perfect air of timidity, yet purposeful.

She came up to the men, lying suffering on their couches of leaves, and offered them herbs tied in bunches, and powders in gaily painted bark, drops in a horn container, signifying that these would cure them.

The settlers accepted the kindness of the Indian maiden, the oldest of them kissing her little hand gratefully. In pantomime Takatelka promised them health on the morrow, gave them a pipe in token of friendship, and ran swiftly, softly back to the shading trees and was lost amid their shadows.

There was loud applause for this pretty little living legend, and the chorus sang a song that set forth the fact that mercy is found everywhere and pity turns a foe into a friend.

After this there was tableau after tableau, showing the little village following the peaceful work of building and tilling the soil, then gradually resenting the taxation from over seas that allowed no voice to the colony paying it, the rejection of the taxed tea, the mustering of the militia, the return after the Revolution, the hearing the news of the death of Washington. The sending of sons away to colonize far distant Ohio, the long journeying by stage to Boston, the return with new fashions, and tidings of political changes, the strange story told by a traveller of the steamboat, *Clermont,* that had gone down the Hudson, the revolutionizing of all things by this same steam, which ended in the foundation of another Chagford, and its mills, over by the leaping falls. The outbreak of the Civil War and the marching away of Chagford's sons, the heart-breaking waiting and watching at home of her daughters, their brave help in hospital and sewing-room, the sorrow and joy at the end, when victory was won and so many returned — and so many never came back! Finally the series of tableaux that set forth the events of the last half century, and Chagford's share in them. The pageant ended with a tableau representing the three Chagfords, standing in a triangle, with clasped hands. Around them marched in their order all the characters which had been showing how the Chagfords had come to be what they were, singing " The Song of the Chagfords, Three in One," which Mrs. Porter had written, and for which Miss Belinda had composed excellent music. From among the crowd of personages of the two hundred and fifty odd years which comprised Chagford's history, Rick stepped forth alone, his radiant eyes fixed beyond the sea of faces before him. He was in the costume of the drummer boy of the Civil War whom he had represented, and he carried his violin. Raising it to his shoulder he played, simply, but with marvellous quality of tone and feeling, " Home, Sweet Home," played it as only Rick, or another true violinist could play it, amid the breathless stillness of the vast audience. Then the bands took up the air, the leader of the choruses raised his baton, turning to the audience to invite it to join them. With a sound like the sea the great concourse of people got upon its feet and sang " Home, Sweet Home." The sun was setting when the last note died away. With the music and the day Chagford's pageant ended.

Doctor Porter, still in his costume of Colonial days — he had represented one of the councillors of the village when Massachusetts Bay Colony was discussing declaring independence — drove his wife and little girl home in the buggy with Tonic, leaving their guests to follow, and bring Rick, in another carriage.

Nancy, dressed as Takatelka, leaned her head, happily weary, against the buff waistcoat of the Colonial gentleman holding the reins.

" It has been perfectly beautiful and I know the things I knew before quite differently, for seeing them sort of unrolled, one after the other," she said. " Do you suppose that is the way the angels see the world, daddy? All its years at once, running backward and yet unfolding? They must understand us, if they do."

The doctor smiled at his wife over the bent head of the poetical little Indian.

" I think so, Takatelka," he said. " But one thing I have always tried to show you: We shall never fully understand anything or anybody till we see like the angels, all around, and backward and forward, the causes that went to make them what they are."

" Both good and bad?" said Nancy dreamily.

" Both good and bad, my bonny. It teaches us justice, and justice is the highest form of mercy," said the doctor, drawing tired, blissful Nancy close, with a hug and a pat such as it is safe to say the real Takatelka never got from her father, the Indian chief.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SECRET OF THE MOONSTONE BALL

A MONTH after the pageant Nancy was thirteen years old.

"Good morning, my Assistant!" called the doctor at the foot of the stairs. "Rise up and salute the new day and your new year!"

"I did rise up, long ago," cried Nancy, appearing, fully dressed, leaning toward her father over the balustrade. "And I saluted my new year and everybody's new day. Now I'm coming down to salute you."

She ran lightly down-stairs and jumped from the third one from the bottom into her father's outstretched arms. He held her close for a moment, then kissed her gravely on her low, broad forehead.

"All good be yours, dear child, for this year and every year, all joy, yet strength and wisdom to meet sorrow when it must come," he said. "This is really my festal day more than yours, mine and your mother's. We are thankful for the tardy gift we received thirteen years ago to-day, of this dear little daughter."

"I don't know about that, daddydee! I'm pretty thankful I was sent here, and not to any other M. D. — because then the letters wouldn't stand for My Daddy and My Dearest, both!" cried Nancy. "Isn't it lucky we pleased one another, we three Porters, when we met thirteen years ago! Where is motherkins? I must go and hug her, too."

"'The queen was in the counting-house,' but now she is where the maid is — in the kitchen," said the doctor. "I understand that we are to celebrate all day to-day, beginning with something special for breakfast, which your mother is concocting. Nancy, only think! You are now a teen-y girl, instead of my tiny girl, as you have been!"

"Never mind, if I'm not a *toney* girl; I do hate that word!" cried Nancy, hopping and skipping away from her father in pursuit of her mother and Letty Hetty, to be congratulated and blessed by them both.

"Nancy," said Mrs. Porter, "it is your birthday, but would you mind doing an errand for me, though you are supposed not to have any duties to-day?"

"Perhaps I shall mind, but perhaps I'll hide it and do the errand anyway," said Nancy.

"It's only to leave this pattern for Dean at Grandma Emerson's," said artful Mrs. Porter, hoping that Nancy would not guess that she was trying to get her out of the way for awhile. "Your father is going that way; he will take you."

"I'll take you farther, if you've nothing better to do, Assistant," said the doctor, entering the room and into the plot at the same time. "I have a nice jogging trip to make to North Chagford, which you may take with me, if you will: the day is perfect for a tonic drive — either with or without the capital T."

"I haven't anything to do this morning: this afternoon the girls are coming," said Nancy. "I'd love to go, pater meus."

"We are now thirteen and through our four declensions! What it is to have a classical training!" observed the doctor to no one in particular.

"That's what my mother gives me in our home lessons that you both think must be given up for me to go to school!" laughed Nancy, catching up her coat and hat from the back of the hall chair and rapidly getting them on to go with father.

"You were such a sensible child to choose October for your birth month, Nancy!" said the doctor, as they swung down the street in a leisurely manner, and Tonic's hoofs made restful music among the golden, red and russet leaves along the side of the road whenever he turned out for another horse. "It is such a peaceful, halcyon time of year, and it seems to me I do not remember a storm on your birthday! It is always a golden, brooding day like this! Now, I was born in February, you know, and bad weather is more likely than not to be my share."

"Well, the three best Americans I know of were born in the little month, — George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and another," said Nancy slyly.

"Oh, Nancy, charity is all very well, but I'd hardly call tipsy old Jim Ludlow one of the three best Americans, though the records of his constant arrests show that he is a February product," remonstrated the doctor, suddenly grown stupid.

"Doctor Porter, let me advise you to consult Doctor Ganson at once," said Nancy, with an excellent imitation of the manner of her father's professional colleague. "Your trouble is mental, sir, the brain, I am sure of it, and you should have help, sir, at once, immediately!"

Whereupon they both laughed, as happy people will laugh at small things, and drove on contentedly.

At Grandma Emerson's Nancy left the buggy for a moment to make a flying visit, upon her mother's errand. She found the little old lady looking well and cheerful; she had improved wonderfully since Dean Okley had come to live with her. Dean was quiet, cheerful and most helpful at the two ends of the day when she was at home, and her presence at night removed the old lady's fear, which she would never acknowledge, of being alone when serious illness came upon her. Nancy was surprised to see Dean at home this morning. She was so busy that there was rarely a day which she had to herself. Dean was an excellent little sempstress, and such a pretty, gentle, attractive girl that there was more demand on her time than there was time for the demand.

"Mamma sent this pattern for Dean," said Nancy. "I don't suppose she thought you'd be at home, Dean, but she asked me to leave it here."

"Thank you," said Dean with a tiny smile at Grandma Emerson. "Yes, there was something I wanted to do to-day. Aren't you going to stay one minute?"

"Not one minute; papa's waiting," said Nancy. "This is my birthday. Aren't you coming to our house? You always come on my birthday, Grandma! You and Dean come to tea; I know mamma'll be delighted if you will."

"Oh, is this your birthday, Nancy?" asked Grandma Emerson, so indifferently that Nancy wondered and was half hurt. "I do believe it is! Well, I'm sure I hope you'll have a pleasant day to-day, and many happy returns. I may come up some time to-day, Dean and I, if there's time."

Dean's heart failed her when she saw how puzzled and disappointed Nancy looked.

"Oh, there's sure to be time!" she said. "Thank you, Nancy. I'm sure Mrs. Emerson and I will go."

"Please!" said Nancy, and ran back to her waiting father and Tonic.

They jogged along pleasantly, through the increasing warmth of the perfect day, out to the country peace of North Chagford. Over the hills the atmosphere looked mauve coloured, all around at short range it was a bath of splendour and, looking straight ahead, through the near-at-hand gorgeousness to the blended and softened radiance of the autumn-hued trees, there were dancing waves of radiating heat in the sun, shimmering before Tonic's nose against a background of side shadows.

"Nancy, it is a day for 'As You Like It,'" cried the doctor. "Let us begin with the scene in the Forest of Arden and the exiled Duke's lines."

It was common for this father and daughter to entertain each other in their drives with recitations from the poets whom the doctor loved and had taught Nancy to love, the great Elizabethans, whom so many go through life unknowing. Doctor Porter had early begun this remarkable training of his little girl, and now Nancy's mind was stored with these riches of his giving, far exceeding the value of any other gift he could have made her.

Now, at her father's suggestion, Nancy and he alternately repeated the beautiful lines of the exquisite second act of "As You Like It," merely for the delight of hearing the music of Shakespeare's poetry, the wisdom of his thought, in the midst of a day so akin to the spirit of the scene.

"Oh, Ladybird, what it is to have had the treasures of the past laid up for us!" sighed Doctor Porter, contentedly, as he reached his destination and sought for his small black bag, leaving Nancy to hold Tonic while he went in to make his call.

The call was not a long one and Tonic trotted home at a better pace than he had come, so the doctor and "his assistant" reached home in good time for dinner, which was served in this simple household in the middle of the day.

Letty Hetty met Nancy at the side door on her arrival. “Your mother has company in the library,” she said in a loud whisper. “She wanted I should tell you they’d be here for dinner, and you should slip up-stairs and put on your blue with the narrow velvet ribbon, and that little fine tucked guimpe, with the narrow real lace edgin’. You come down the back stairs when you’re ready and I’ll button it up the back for you.”

“I can button that guimpe, it’s so soft, thank you, Letty Hetty,” said Nancy. “Who is the company? It must be some one mamma is a little particular about my looking nice when they see me.”

“Yes, it must be. I can’t really tell you who ’tis, Nancy, but it isn’t a man,” said Letty Hetty, and Nancy ran away unsuspiciously, without asking any more questions.

She was quick about dressing, and soon returned, her hair prettily rolled and tied above her ears, the dainty white guimpe with the fine lace fastened around her throat, the gray-blue gown, with its darker rows of gray-blue velvet ribbon, falling in soft folds straight from the short empire waist that met the guimpe in a narrow yoke.

"I think I'm all right, but I wanted you to see, Letty Hetty," said Nancy, stopping in the hall where Letty Hetty intercepted her. It occurred to Nancy, with her first dim suspicion, that Letty Hetty did not want her to go into the kitchen.

"You're all right and more," said Letty Hetty, turning the little girl around on all sides. "Pull out that chain, it's turning your ruffle down. There, that's the only thing I see to do to you!"

"This is the day when I may open this moonstone ball and read its secret," said Nancy, straightening her chain and her ruffle. "I was going to do it this morning, but I didn't. I thought maybe the Misses Allaire would be down to-day, and I'd rather open it when they could see me do it."

"I shouldn't wonder if they did come, or Miss Belinda anyway, as it's your birthday," said Letty Hetty. "Run along, child; you'll find your mother and the company in the library."

Nancy walked hesitatingly to the door. She heard no voices, and opened it. There sat her mother in her prettiest, new gray gown. And there with her were the Misses Allaire, Grandma Emerson and Dean, Louise and Amabel, Mimi and Doris, Cord, the four Coggs girls and Miss Drummond, all gowned as for an occasion, all smiling broadly as Nancy stood transfixed in the doorway!

"Many happy returns of the day!" shouted the entire gathering in a chorus as solid in sound as those of the pageant.

"Dinner is ready, Miss Nancy Porter," announced Letty Hetty, looking in at the other door before Nancy could recover herself.

Mrs. Porter arose and the doctor, unexpectedly appearing in ceremonious attire, offered his arm to Grandma Emerson. Mrs. Porter laughingly gave her arm to Miss Allaire, "for lack of men in the family," she said, and then bade Nancy take out Miss Belinda. The others fell in line as they pleased, all but Louise and Rick, who began to play a march on piano and violin with an understanding as to time and expression that revealed previous practice.

They marched out to the dining-room and there stood a table, elongated to reach nearly from one end of the room to the other, great globes of chrysanthemums in the middle and at each place, chains of gorgeous autumn leaves edging the table and running from the centrepiece to each plate. Two maids from the Stone House stood ready to serve, and a glimpse through the open door revealed women helping Letty Hetty in the kitchen.

"You are to sit here, Nancy," said the doctor, feeling a little sorry that the plan had been so well carried out, for he saw Nancy's surprise was almost too much for her.

He led Nancy to a seat at the centre of the table; she found when she reached it that it was slightly raised, and around it were piled white packages, tied with various coloured ribbons. They had a bewildering effect on the already benumbed little Lady of the Feast.

"What does it all mean?" she murmured.

"It means that you are thirteen years old to-day, dearie, and this is your dinner-party," explained Mrs. Porter.

"Well, I'm truly surprised!" said Nancy. But she took her place and began to recover. By the time the little neck clams had given place to soup Nancy's spirits rose to the occasion and became quite hilarious.

"My hostess, I received the last bills for the pageant to-day, so I can tell you just what our profits are," said Miss Belinda, peering around the thicket of chrysanthemums which made it hard for her to see Nancy from where she sat.

" Oh, how nice! How much did you make, Miss Belinda? " asked Nancy.

" We, *we*, Lady Takatelka, all of us here! " Miss Belinda corrected her. " Well, from the Water Revel and the pageant proper, clear of expenses, we have in hand two thousand dollars."

" It sounds a lot; will that give us the hospital? " asked Nancy.

" We shall begin to build with that, added to the contributions, which amount to five times that," Doctor Porter answered, as Miss Belinda's glance referred the question to him. " We have the land, given outright. Can you guess by whom? "

Nancy looked around the table, seeking an inspiration — and got it.

" The twins! " she cried.

" The Coggs girls got their guardian's permission, and transferred to the town fifty acres of their land, on the side that is at the upper end of the lake, where the view will be beautiful, the site dry and sunny — in all respects an ideal spot," said Doctor Porter, with a warm look at the embarrassed twins.

" It wasn't anything to do, Nancy," said Maizie. " We like to do it, so there's nothing good about it."

"I thought it was good to like to be kind," said Nancy.

"Nancy has the best of that, Maizie Coggs!" cried Grandma Emerson.

"If it had been giving candy, or something we liked ourselves, we probably wouldn't have done it," said Taizie with her jolly laugh, and not quite truthfully.

Nancy looked at the twins. They were dressed quietly and tastefully; they were at ease, their manners were natural and good, neither stiff nor lax; they spoke, in the main, correctly. How much Miss Drummond had done for them! How fortunate it was that they had her, as it was fortunate that she, now well and happy, had them! There was a strong attachment growing up between the twins and their charming companion.

Nancy thought: "I really did bring them together! That was one good thing that happened while I was twelve years old!" What she said, with a loving look at the kindly Coggs quartette, was: "You'd have done it a great deal quicker, Taizie — you and Maizie, Daisy and Hazie — if it hadn't been easy for you."

Amabel Willis leaned forward, looking handsomer than ever, with a becoming blush and embarrassment on her face.

"There is no one does lovelier things, hard and easy ones and all sorts, than the dear Ladies of the Lake," she said.

And every one applauded, Nancy frantically, partly because they agreed with Amabel, but largely because they all understood that Amabel had thus spoken with difficulty, trying to atone for her earlier treatment of these girls, who had won everybody's liking and respect by the way, young as they were, that they had performed the difficult feat of acquiring riches gracefully and using them well.

"This is Nancy's birthday feast," said Miss Belinda later. "Every one must in turn make her a little speech. Mrs. Emerson?"

"I love my love with an N because she is Nancy. Nancy is my love," said the little old lady promptly.

"She is our little sunshine; may she never be clouded," said Miss Dorinda Allaire.

"She was my little key to closed doors, and has locked herself in our hearts," added Miss Belinda.

"She's the dearest lassie I know," said Louise gently.

"Now, that is not the sort of speeches for Nancy to hear!" interposed the doctor. "She's nothing on earth but my assistant; why are you all trying to spoil her?"

"It wouldn't spoil me, papa," said Nancy, her chin quivering a little, she was so touched. "It's only because we all love one another. What do you suppose I'd say of them?"

"Bravo, Nancy!" cried Grandma Emerson. "It's a poor creature that takes love in any other spirit than that."

But, under cover of the applause of her own little speech, Nancy heard Dean saying on one hand: "Think how much you've done for me, Nancy Porter!"

While on the other sat Rick, whispering under cover of the clapping: "They may all say what they like, but you belong to me, sweet Nancy. You're my sister and more, aren't you?"

"Yes, Richie; we're the close, inside ones. We're always left when everybody else but papa and mamma are gone," answered Nancy. She was fonder of Mimi and Doris than of any of her other friends, but Rick — well, Rick was Rick, closest in sympathy, nearest of kin by nature.

"Aren't you going to open your birthday gifts, Nancy?" asked her mother.

"There are such a lot," said Nancy, surveying them doubtfully. "There isn't room to lay them afterward. Mayn't I take them into the library, and open them there, after dinner? What I'd like to do, if Miss Belinda will let me, is to open the moonstone ball now, and find out what its secret is."

"Haven't you opened it yet, Nancy? I felt sure you would peep into it the first thing this morning!" cried Miss Belinda. "By all means open it, and tell us what is hidden in its little white heart!"

"You said it was a secret worth more than a chart for finding buried treasure," said Nancy, unfastening her chain with eager fingers and taking the moonstone ball in her hand. She caught its tiny knobs between her thumb nails and pulled the ball open. Curled up inside it was a tiny thread of paper which Nancy smoothed out flat on the palm of her hand.

"There is something written on it, but, dear me! it must have been written by one of those people who write the Declaration of Independence, or something like that, in a circle as small as a cent! I never in this wide world could read this! Richie, will you please get that magnifying glass out of the library?" said Nancy, vainly striving to decipher one of the minute strokes which she saw before her.

Rick ran off and was back again in a moment, offering to Nancy the round glass with the ebony handle which he had fetched from the library.

"Thank you," said Nancy, taking it and tilting it over the little wisp of paper outspread in her palm.

"It's a verse," said Nancy, reading slowly. Then she looked up.

"It seems to be something — I don't know; I can't explain. Rather like the Eastern poetry you like, papa," she said. "I see, I see, Miss Belinda! Yes, I do see what you meant!"

"Read it, dear," said Mrs. Porter.

Nancy read, holding the magnifying glass slantingly over her hand:

> "Each soul on earth is lonely, here, and dumb;
> Warm it with love, give life to what is numb,
> And in its glow your own soul's life will come,
> For love is life, and of our life the sum."

"That is the chart to find peace and happiness, if you understand love to mean what it should mean — not selfish fancy, but doing unto others as you would have them do to you," said Grandma Emerson.

"Like the doctor and Mrs. Porter," said Cord unexpectedly.

"Isn't it better than a chart for finding buried treasures, Nancy?" asked Miss Belinda.

Nancy looked serious, yet she smiled happily, her eyes large and luminous with the thoughts and emotions of this wonderful dinner-party and the affection poured out upon her to mark her thirteenth birthday.

"It is true," she said solemnly.

"What do you know about making people happy by loving them and getting love in return, Dame Trot? You are only the old Chagford doctor's assistant!" said the doctor.

Nancy turned upon him her gray eyes, warm and adoring, and smiled at him.

"That's all I am; every single thing," she said.

THE END.

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